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OR, THE FIGHT TO THE FINISH.

A Tale of the Streets and Webs of
New York.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL
FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "HAPPY HUGH,"
"DODGER DICK" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

CAUGHT ON THE WING.

"I BEG your pardon, but you seem to be
lost."

The person to whom these words were address-
ed turned quickly and looked at the speaker.

THE NEXT INSTANT THE TWO MEN WERE ON THE VERY EDGE OF THE PIER—THE
WRONGED MAN CROWDING THE VILLAIN TO THE BRINK.

"I'm both lost and in a fix," was the reply.

"This is a great city, isn't it?"

"Well, I should say so."

"And there are some people in it who are not exactly honest?"

"There's thousands of that kidney. You can't count the rogues of New York on your fingers. You don't seem to live here?"

"I don't. I came in the other day, and I believe I was decoyed to the city. I had some money when I arrived, but now I haven't a cent in my pockets. How am I to get home?"

"Maybe I can help you," was the prompt response. "If you wouldn't mind telling me your story—"

"I'll do that with pleasure, for I feel the need of a friend in a strange city like this. My mission is a singular one and there are some rascals who ought to be behind bars."

"Just where lots of them don't get. But, come with me. I don't live far from here, and I guess there's something in the cupboard, for you look hungry."

Both speakers were boys, one better dressed than the other, and almost any one could have told that they belonged to different parts of the country—that one was from the district beyond the river, while the other was a typical city lad.

The city boy led his new acquaintance down several streets, and at last conducted him up the steps of a tall frame building and into a room where sat a woman who looked up amazed when they entered.

"This is Mr. Jerry Jump from across the river, mother," said the city boy, by way of introduction. "He's in a stew from what he's told me. In other words, he's fallen among thieves, and I think somebody ought to be ticketed for Sing Sing."

The woman who had a sorrowful but kindly face, spoke pleasantly to the country youth and then, at the other's request, went to the larder and brought out the remains of a supper which had been discussed not long before.

"You can eat and talk if you want to," suggested the city boy, Fred Paster, "mother and I will listen."

"I shall have to begin some years back—ten at least. About that time my father was living, and we had a very happy home over in Jersey. Father was very ingenious and invented some labor-saving machines that brought in a great deal of money. In fact, we soon became rich, but instead of investing our money in land, where it would be safe, father foolishly bought a lot of diamonds. He used to say that they could be sold at a handsome profit at any time, and that, besides, they were easily hidden. I often warned him not to put his wealth into such stuff, but he would not listen, and sometimes would get very angry whenever we mentioned the matter."

"Well, things went on in this shape for some time. It seemed to us that every dollar father got went into diamonds. He bought some magnificent ones, and soon the whole country knew what he was doing. Five years ago he suddenly said that he had made enough out of his patents, and, against our wishes, sold out every one of them and invested the whole sum in precious stones. We began to fear that his mind was affected. One night the diamonds disappeared. I never knew just where they were kept, but I knew that they had been stolen by finding father in the woods, a raving maniac. We never found out where he had hid the gems, for he could not tell us, and, to add to our affliction, he disappeared soon afterward, and to this day his fate is a mystery."

"But awhile ago you seemed to speak of him as dead," suggested Fred who had not lost a word of the narrative.

"Perhaps I did," was the reply. "Mother is convinced that he is dead, and I sometimes follow her convictions when speaking of him. As for myself, I don't know what to think. After the theft of the diamonds and father's vanishment, we made another terrible discovery. He had involved us all in ruin, for his passion for gems had caused him to secretly sell the farm, and when we came to look for our home we found disaster staring us in the face. But, we managed to live on the place for some years, owing to the kindness of those into whose hands it had passed; but now we live in town, and mother takes in sewing to help us along."

"What brought me to New York? I'm coming to that. Several weeks ago I saw a man in our village who sported a very fine pin. He came on the train from this city and put up at our only hotel. I happened to be there when he came, and the moment I saw the pin, a thrill I cannot describe ran through me. My head seemed on fire, and I found myself looking not

at the man himself, but at his pin, which was a fine diamond. Now, among father's gems was one just like it; I had seen it often, and that's why I could not help looking at it at every opportunity. Well, the man did not stay as long as it seemed he wanted to. He made some inquiries about father, and the landlord up and told him all about the robbery and father's disappearance. Then the man said he was a detective, but when the tavern-keeper told him that I was Thomas Jump's son, he did not take any more interest in the robbery; indeed, he paid his bill and went away."

"I did not know of these things until after the stranger had departed. He had said that he was doing business on the Bowery, and when the landlord asked him for his card, he said it wasn't necessary, but said that his name was Simon Sharp, and that he could be found at all times without difficulty. The more I thought over the matter, the more convinced I became that that man knew something about the robbery of the diamonds, and I sat down and wrote a letter to Simon Sharp, Bowery, asking him if he would take the case in hand."

"And of course got no answer?" eagerly asked Fred, with a smile.

The young man from the country ran one hand into his bosom and produced a letter, at sight of which the eyes of the city boy fairly snapped.

"This is what I got," exclaimed young Jump. "It was some days before I heard anything, but it came one day, and the next morning I packed up and came on."

While he spoke he extended the letter, which Fred took and opened.

"It's a slick bit of rascality," said the city lad, glancing up at Jerry Jump's anxious face. "The writer of the letter wants you to come to the city, and even sets a day for your arrival. Did you come on time?"

"No, I got here a day in advance."

"And spoiled his plans!" cried Fred. "I presume you've been through the Bowery looking for Simon Sharp's office?"

"I confess that I have. I've tramped every foot of the Bowery from end to end."

"Looking for a needle in a haystack!" laughed the other. "If you had come on time, Mr. Sharp would have been on hand to welcome you. It's a good thing you missed him."

"I think so myself," assented Jerry.

"He's only one of thousands of rogues who infest New York. He has a den somewhere on the Bowery, else he wouldn't have received your letter."

"But, what did he want me to come on for? I had no money."

"Oh, he's up to some trickery," asserted Fred. "I wish I had him in my Rogue's Gallery, for then you might recognize him."

"You might show Mr. Jump the photographs anyhow," put in Mrs. Paster.

Fred left the room for a minute, and when he came back he was carrying in his arms a book of corpulent proportions.

"I catch them on the wing," he explained, depositing the book on the table. "The detective camera is a great thing, nowadays. You can get a fellow and he don't know it. I make some odd dimes at the business, for I now and then 'catch' a face that is of some value to the police or the Secret Service men, and they buy the picture."

Already Jerry was leaning over the book, gazing at the many faces displayed while Fred slowly turned the leaves.

"You don't mean to say that you take photographs on the street?" he queried, in undisguised astonishment.

"Yes; I used to be in a gallery, and there's where I learned the art of catching 'em on the wing. I carry the camera under my coat and all I have to do is to touch the button, and I have my customer, all O. K. It's done in a jiffy, and the fellow caught is none the wiser for it, either. Over on Mulberry street, at Police Headquarters, they sometimes call me Photograph Fred, the Camera Sharp. I catch 'em all the same," and the young photographer laughed triumphantly.

"Where do you find your subjects?" queried Jerry.

"Everywhere; on the street, in the Park, along the rivers, before the theaters; I'm picking 'em up wherever I go. Now, there's a chap I caught yesterday. Of course he knew nothing about my little game, or I fancy he would have spoiled it."

The next moment the Jersey boy bent closer to the page before him and began to stare at the face referred to by the young photographer.

"Did you really take that picture yester-

day?" he asked, his breath coming quick, showing excitement.

"I 'shot' him on Broadway," assured Fred.

"Why, that is the man who came to our hotel and called himself Simon Sharp, detective."

In an instant Photograph Fred was holding his breath, and his hand caught Jerry's wrist.

"Be sure of it!" he exclaimed. "Don't make a mistake about that face."

"I would almost swear to the identity of that face," avowed the young Jerseyite, resolutely. "That is Simon Sharp, the rascal who decoyed me to New York, and who knows something about the lost diamonds, if not all about the mystery that overshadows my father's fate."

Fred carried the album to the window where the light was stronger, and Jerry eagerly followed him.

"I am positive now," said the latter, when he examined the little photograph under a magnifying glass. "He has a scar at the corner of one eye. You caught even that, I see. That scar establishes his identity. Do you think you could find him again?"

"Since you want him, he shall be found!" declared Fred. "I am willing to devote my life to the clearing up of the mystery which brought you among the vultures and sharks of Gotham. From now on Fred Paster and his camera are at your service, Jerry Jump, for I've taken a great liking to you and will stick by you like a brother!"

The Jersey boy seized Fred's hands and poured out his thanks.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERY NUMBER TWO.

ALREADY a strong bond of friendship existed between the young Camera Sharp and Jerry Jump, and the Jersey boy accepted Fred's invitation to make his headquarters in his humble home where they could consult at all times, and from which they could sally forth in their search for Simon Sharp.

Night was not far off when the boys met for the first time and shortly after Jerry had recognized the photograph which Fred Paster had taken on the sly, they left the house and went over into the Bowery.

"You'll find everybody here if you watch long enough," announced the youthful photographer as they turned into that famous thoroughfare. "I catch many of my subjects on the Bowery, and here's where the detectives find many of their prizes. We won't look for Simon Sharp's sign, for, ten chances to one that he never hung one out; so we'll just keep our eyes open awhile and then go down and call on Melly."

The Jersey boy looked at his friend, but asked no questions, and for some time they were employed in scrutinizing every face they saw.

"You don't see him, eh?" the boy photographer queried at last.

"Not yet, but I'm not discouraged, for haven't I just seen the rascal's picture?"

"Did Simon Sharp come to Rosedale alone?"

"He did so far as I know," answered Jerry.

"How long did he stay?"

"Two days in all."

"I asked you because such rascals don't generally play all their games alone. They have some pal, some fellow like themselves with whom they share the swag. Now, Simon Sharp is just the sort of a man to have a pard, and if we can't find him we might pick up his pard, and thus strike his trail. I recollect now that when I took him on the street he seemed to be waiting for some one, and soon after he was joined by a chap with whom he walked away. I didn't get to catch them together, and therefore lost the other one entirely, but I noticed that he had a game shoulder—that is, one a little lower than the other. Don't forget this while you're taking in the people on the Bowery."

"Which shoulder was the lower?"

"The left one. But, let's go down and see Melly. I helped to start her up in business, a little time ago, and I'm sort of anxious to see how she's coming on."

Jerry, as his look indicated, was curious to know how Fred, a boy like himself, could set any one up in business, and he immediately evinced a desire to see Melly. Photograph Fred led the way from the brilliantly lighted Bowery into a darker side street, and ten minutes later the boys halted before the low door of a small house whose exterior told of very plain things within.

"This is Melly's," said young Paster, looking at his companion. "You've seen finer houses

since you struck New York, especially if you've been on Fifth avenue where the gold-bugs live; but Melly's happy for all that, and I call her a daisy."

The door could not boast of a bell, so Fred rapped with bare knuckles. Presently footsteps sounded in the hall beyond, and then the door opened, revealing a girl in plain clothes, but with the brightest pair of eyes one sees in a day's journey.

"I've brought you Jerry Jump from Jersey," explained Photograph Fred, conducting Jerry forward. "This is Melly, Jerry—Melly Noonan, the Star of the Streets."

The eyes seemed to increase in brightness, and the girl laughed as she escorted the boys to a snug little room at the end of the hall.

"I got rid of all my papers to-day, and in a few minutes at that," began the girl, who had seen sixteen summers, though she was rather small for her years. "You see, the news from Africa did it for me. Stanley has found Emin Pasha, and everybody wanted to read about it. They didn't seem to care for change. Why, the big man who was so clever once before, handed me a half-dollar and said: 'Never mind the pennies, girl,' and was off like a flash of light. I don't like his face, as I've told before, Fred; but he's a clever fellow, all the same."

"I'm afraid Melly's mashed on him," said the city lad, winking at Jerry, as the girl concluded. "The other time he bought a paper he gave her a quarter, and now he's increased the pile. I guess she'd like for Stanley to find Emin What's-his-name every other day."

Miss Noonan smiled and said she would not care how often the big man gave her almost ten times her price for her papers.

"You ought to catch him with your camera, Fred," she laughed. "I can't say when he will turn up again, but I'd like to have his picture, anyhow."

"Maybe I have it here," answered the boy photographer, lifting from his pocket the picture of Simon Sharp which he had taken from the album the last thing before quitting the house. "Here's a chap I 'caught' on Broadway the other day. Is he your liberal friend?"

He tossed the little picture into Melly's lap, and the boys saw the girl bend toward the lamp and look at it.

All at once Melly uttered a cry of surprise. "You've caught the very man!" she exclaimed. "You've caught the person who gave me a half-dollar for the paper!"

The boys looked at one another, but did not speak. They could hardly believe what they had heard.

"I can't be mistaken," continued Melly Noonan. "I would know his face anywhere, and you have taken it very well. Yes, this is the man."

"That is Simon Sharp, the man in whom Jerry and I are just now very much interested," replied Fred. "And, if all accounts are true, there's not a bigger rogue in New York."

"I never called him an honest man," quickly interposed the new girl. "He looks too slick to be that. But, that's the man and no mistake."

When Melly had identified the photograph, Fred resolved to make her acquainted with Jerry's mission to the city, and she listened to the story of it with undisguised astonishment. She, too, had no doubt that Simon Sharp, or, the man whose portrait Fred had slyly taken, was the same one who had made the trip to Rosedale, and volunteered to report immediately her next meeting with him.

"This is something," said the Camera Sharp to Jerry. "You identify my picture and so does Melly. That shows that the original is still in the city. When we've found him we'll not lose sight of him till we have tracked him home. He's as desperate as he is sleek looking. I saw that in his eyes."

"Were they brighter than the big diamond he wears on his shirt front?" and the girl smiled, archly.

"He didn't happen to wear one when I caught him."

"He had it on to-day," was the reply. "Why, it seemed like a star, it was so large."

"Father had one beautiful stone," put in Jerry. "It was the delight of my eyes, and he promised that I should inherit it. It was almost perfectly round and had a yellowish cast."

"Mr. Sharp's diamond was round; I noticed that much," Melly rejoined. "I'm willing to lose a good customer in order to hear of Mr. Jump getting even with the man who wrecked his home. You must not let him slip through your fingers, Fred. He's as slippery as an eel; his hands are as soft as silk, but his eye tells the tale."

A few moments later Fred and Jerry were once more on the street, and the Camera Sharp explained that he had furnished Melly with sufficient capital to embark in the newspaper business on a small scale, that she had a little stand on a corner, and a goodly number of regular patrons, beside some transients who dropped round now and then, taking the odd numbers off her hands.

"It seems to me that we have got a start," pursued Fred. "Of course there is a bare possibility that the man I've 'caught' is not the Simon Sharp who came to Rosedale; but, I'm going to think he is till we know more. You never heard anything positive about your father's death?"

"Nothing," answered Jerry. "Are we near the city post-office?"

"Just a few blocks further down."

"I've been looking for a letter from mother," returned Jerry. "She promised to write, and I would like to hear from her."

"We'll go down and inquire," and the boys turned into the Bowery again, and ere long Jerry was at the general call window of the huge post-office building.

In reply to his query he was handed a letter which he grasped eagerly, and turned to his friend with tears of joy in his eyes.

"Mother has kept her promise," he exclaimed, and then he stepped to one side and tore open the letter.

While the Jersey boy read the letter from home, Fred was watching everybody who came and went in that particular part of the great building. He was thus engaged when he heard a sharp cry, and looking up at Jerry, saw him beckoning him with eager hand.

"Something else has happened!" said the Jersey boy. "I tell you this is a deeper plot than we think. Mother writes that the out-house, in which we kept the many models of father's inventions, and those not finished when he disappeared, has been broken into, and the unfinished ones carried off!"

Photograph Fred looked like a person who does not know what to say.

"Broken open and the models stolen?" was all he could gasp.

"That is just what has been done," asserted Jerry. "The deed was done night before last. What do you think of that?"

The Camera Sharp did not reply.

"Now, what good would a lot of unfinished models do a thief?" continued Jerry. "Nobody knew how to finish them but father, and they were very imperfect when he went off. This is the second blow, Fred. They first beggar us, and then steal the models of what may be the beginning of a new fortune."

"Let's go home and try to think this mystery out," Fred suggested. "I believe it won't be dark, always. You will read what your mother has written, and then we'll put our heads together. There may be a connection between the theft of the models and your father's disappearance. Who knows?"

Jerry would have asked Photograph Fred for an explanation of his words if he had not turned away. The boys did not speak much to one another during the homeward walk, but when the little room in the tall house had been reached, Fred turned upon his friend and catching his wrist, said in tones that seemed to thrill him:

"Your father is living somewhere, Jerry! The models were stolen for him to finish. That's my opinion, and I'll bet Fred Paster's head that I'm right."

CHAPTER III.

A WOLF LOSES HIS BONE.

WHILE Photograph Fred and Jerry Jump were wending their way toward the home of the former, a man who is destined to play no inconsiderable part in our story, was bestowing a good deal of curiosity on a carriage which was moving slowly in the middle of a street and under the many lights of New York.

He had come upon the vehicle by accident, and was now following it after the manner of a spy.

In person the shadow was rather tall, but he had one physical defect, a stoop in one shoulder which seemed to throw the whole body "out of plumb" as it were; but he was nimble-footed and easily kept up with the carriage. He did not give up the chase until he had tracked the vehicle to a well-to-do residence on a quiet street. He there saw a young lady descend from the carriage and enter the house, and when the door had closed upon her, he walked away like a person satisfied with what he had ascertained.

A few minutes later the man with the drop

shoulder entered a certain shop on one of the not over decent thoroughfares of the great city. She shop was small and was inhabited by a man known everywhere as "Old Hawkbill." His real name, to the few who knew it, was Jacob Moneyfist, but "Old Hawkbill" was good enough for those who had dealings with him.

The moment the man entered the shop, which was not very well lighted, a figure came from the rear, and the two met in the middle of the room.

"I've been waiting for you," smiled Old Hawkbill in a whining voice. "You said you would be here by a certain hour and the time has passed."

"Well, I saw something on the street that kept me back," was the man's answer. "But, never mind, I'm here anyhow. You can lock up now if you want to."

Jacob Moneyfist glided to the front door, which he locked, and then came back to his visitor, whom he conducted to a rear room of small dimensions where burned a greasy lamp on a greasier table.

"Did you bring it with you?" he asked glancing at his visitor's hand ere it disappeared in his bosom.

The reply was a withdrawal of the hand, and the next moment the stranger was unwrapping something on the table. Old Hawkbill eyed his hands like a hawk, and when the last paper was removed and a little model in brass stood before him, he gave vent to an exclamation of surprise and wonder.

"How's that for fine work?" cried he of the deformed shoulder, falling back and looking first at the model and then at Old Hawkbill. "I fancy that you don't see anything like it very often."

The little black eyes of the old proprietor of the shop sparkled like diamonds. He leaned forward in his wonder and looked closely at the model, at the same time smoothing his face thoughtfully, as if calculating how much it was worth.

"I'd like to know where you run across such things," said he at last.

"Of course you would," laughed the other. "You'd like to know how you're going to get into paradise, but you're not likely to have the riddle solved before you die. Where did I run across this wonderful bit of mechanism? Ha, ha! that's a joke. You see a fortune in it, don't you, Jacob?"

The eyes snapped an affirmative reply.

"I know where there are more fortunes in models," continued the stranger. "I can lay my hand on other things in brass and wood just as wonderful as the one you see before you."

"Don't you want a partner?" asked Old Hawkbill.

The man addressed leaned back in his dirty chair and looked into the parchment face before him for a minute.

"I might want something of the kind, that's a fact," he replied. "I want to make some money out of this little invention, and what is wanting is for some one to father it and get it patented. You have patented some devices, Jacob; a rat-trap for one, though they say it never caught anything, ha, ha!"

Old Hawkbill essayed a feeble smile and looked at the model again.

"I believe I'd rather sell out and be done with the whole affair," resumed the man, leaning back in the chair. "There's a bargain in it, Jacob."

"And a big risk," whined Old Hawkbill.

"How so?"

"The real inventor might come forward and claim his work."

The person with the low shoulder laughed.

"I'll guarantee you against that," said he. "The hand that made that model will never come between you and success. I will attend to that. You can have it patented under your own name and be perfectly safe. It's a gold mine, man."

Old Hawkbill eyed the model once more and seemed to confirm his visitor's last words.

"What will you take for all rights?" he finally squeaked.

"One thousand dollars."

In an instant all color left the old man's face and he fell back with a gasp.

"Why not beggar me at once?" he exclaimed.

"One thousand for a bit of machinery that has never been tried? I can't think of such a sum."

"Very well; this ends the trade," and the man coolly picked up the little model and put it back in his bosom. "I guess there are some people in New York who know a good thing when they see it, and they're not very hard to find."

The avaricious eyes of Old Hawkbill had followed the model to its hiding-place, and they now had a look of danger.

"You don't want it very bad, I see," continued the other, rising. "I'll hunt another market, and you'll live to see what you've missed. What's one thousand to a man like you? I know that you've sat in this little shop and made money, hand over fist. They say you haven't made all of it honestly, but, that's none of my business. I've just pocketed your chance, and you don't seem to realize it."

Old Hawkbill said nothing, but let the man move down toward the door which he opened by putting his hand behind him.

"You don't want it, eh?" he said, sharply, eyeing old Jacob.

"I can't be beggared," whined the old rascal.

"You mean that you want to get a fortune for nothing," was the quick retort. "Well, you don't shave me. I know what I've got and I'll make the fortune myself."

Out in the little shop there were many shadows. The various goods on the dusty shelves were barely distinguishable, and Old Hawkbill had put up his front shutters before the coming of his caller. The way between the counters was very narrow and almost as dark as the path of a forest after night.

The man with the model must have been afraid, for he suddenly pressed his hand against his breast where the model lay, and tried to make out old Jacob's movements in the semi-gloom.

"I'll give you two hundred," said Old Hawkbill, slipping forward in his felt shoes.

"Oh no, Jacob," laughed the other. "I know what I've got."

"I'll put on another hundred," ventured the old shark.

"One thousand or nothing," was the answer.

Old Hawkbill was heard to take a long breath. He glided closer to the man with the model who was moving rapidly toward the front door, and all at once, with the leap of a panther, fell upon him and threw him over the edge of the counter, at the same time covering his mouth with one of his big hands.

It was the work of but a moment, and the possessor of the coveted model was at Old Hawkbill's mercy.

No noise which the sharpest ears outside could have detected had accompanied the attack, and when Old Hawkbill desisted, the man lying against the counter did not move, but lay like one dead, half-way upon it.

For a few moments the figure of the old shark stood at the front door with an ear glued to the key-hole; but at last he crept back to where his victim lay and his dark hand felt the stranger's wrist.

Not a word said the old villain. He ran his hand into the hiding-place of the model and drew it forth. He carried it back into the little room, where he dropped beside the table and examined the prize with eager eyes.

"There's thousands in it," said he to himself. "I have it all to myself now, and that is better than paying a thousand dollars for it. Of course, I'd like to know where he got it, but I'm afraid he'll never tell me."

He laughed at the idea, and then went back to where he had left his victim. Picking up the body with great ease, he brought it back to the little room where he lowered the light until the chamber was almost dark; then he opened a trap in the floor and descended with his burden.

When he reappeared he brought forth the model once more and fell to looking at it from various points of view. Old Hawkbill knew a fine piece of work when he saw one, and he handled the miniature machine with the playfulness of a child.

"There's nothing like it in the world," he declared. "It beats some of Edison's inventions. I wonder why the Wizard of Menlo Park didn't get hold of this idea? What would he give for it? It's come to me complete. All I have to do, after a reasonable lapse of time, is to put it forward as my own and reap the harvest of gold which it is bound to yield."

Old Hawkbill let several hours slip by while he toyed with the model. He took no note of time, saw nothing but the prize he had won, and did not hear the clock striking in the tower a square from his den.

At last he left the chair and unlocking a large iron-safe in one corner of the room, the model was placed in a pigeon hole and the heavy door reclosed. When the lock clicked, telling him that the little bit of brass, which had probably cost a human life since sundown, was safe, he struck the table with his fist and burst into a triumphant laugh.

"I'm no fool; I never was one," cried he. "I

don't let good things slip through my fingers, and I never allow myself to be bled when I can get what I want by a little muscle."

Half an hour later the shop kept by Old Hawkbill was as still as the tomb, and the policeman who passed it every half-hour, on his beat, did not dream that a crime, which might be murder, had taken place beyond its threshold.

The next morning, at his usual hour, Old Hawkbill unlocked his safe, eager for a look at the wonderful model which had been carefully wrapped up in several thicknesses of cloth. He thought that the safe did not open with its usual ease, but this circumstance caused no alarm.

Pulling open the door, he reached for the model, but the pigeon-hole was empty!

"Where is it?" gasped old Jacob, growing pale.

He had been robbed!

Unnerved, Old Hawkbill fell back from the safe and tried to clutch a chair for support; but his powers failed him, and, with a gasping cry, he dropped to the floor, unconscious.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE CELLAR.

It was the morning after the robbery of Old Hawkbill's safe and Photograph Fred and Jerry Jump were in the vicinity of the second-hand shop when the Camera Sharp proposed to go and look over the old fellow's wares.

"A great many stolen things find their way to old Jacob's shelves," explained Fred. "If the models have been stolen for trade we may find them there, and if we don't there won't be much time lost."

Jerry acceded to the proposition and the boys turned into the street which had the responsibility of harboring Old Hawkbill.

"Ho, the place is closed!" suddenly exclaimed Fred, catching sight of the store. "The Old Hawk is usually an early bird, but, here, he isn't up yet! Something may have happened, but we shall see."

Sure enough, the shop was shut; the shutters in front were still up, making it evident that they had not been down since the night before.

This condition of affairs was occasioning some remarks in the immediate neighborhood, and in a short time the boys saw two policemen come round the corner.

Their presence attracted some attention, and by the time had they reached the store a curious crowd had assembled.

"Let's stay and see what has happened," urged Fred. "I may 'catch' something," and he tapped his breast, reminding Jerry that the detective camera was ready for a shot.

The failure of Old Hawkbill to have his shop open at a certain hour led to the belief that a crime of some kind had been committed and the police had been notified.

It did not take the blue-coats long to open the front door, and in a little while they were in the shop. The crowd would have rushed in at their heels if the police had not objected, but Photograph Fred, who was recognized by the lieutenant, was allowed to follow, and a nod toward Jerry, indicating that they were together that morning and interested in the case in hand, secured an admission for the Jersey boy.

The store-room was dark enough, and the four pushed on to the little chamber at one end where Old Hawkbill lodged and concocted his villainies.

"That's his private room," whispered Photograph Fred. "We're likely to find something there."

The lieutenant had already put his hand on the latch and the next moment they stood in the apartment.

There was no sign of old Jacob's presence in the place, and the two boys exchanged looks of disappointment.

Not satisfied with the condition of things, the policemen went up-stairs but found nothing. Old Hawkbill had evidently deserted his establishment.

"You haven't peeped into the cellar," suggested Fred.

"So we haven't, boy," was the reply, and just then the patrolman discovered the door in the floor.

The lifting of the trap disclosed a flight of steps and the searchers, headed by the flash of a dark lantern, went down into the foul depth rather cautiously.

The cellar was a repository for trumpery of all kinds, and the air was foul enough to make the explorers gasp for breath.

Photograph Fred was helping to search the hole when he suddenly drew back with a loud cry, and all saw there, before him, a man lying on a lot of rags.

He looked horrid in the rays of the bull's-eye, and when one of the policeman took hold of him he broke away and ran to another corner.

Of course he was followed and seized again, and this time he was held beyond a hope of escaping again.

"He looks like the man with the drop shoulder," said Fred to Jerry. "If you will notice, one of his shoulders seems lower than its mate; but how in the name of wonder came he to this hole?"

When caught the second time, the prisoner of the cellar did not speak, but sealed his lips like a person inclined to baffle the police by silence; and even when he had been taken up to Old Hawkbill's room, above the dungeon and placed in a chair, he maintained the same mood.

"It is the same man; there's no doubt of it. He is Simon Sharp's companion, and crooked business of some kind brought him to old Jacob's shop."

"But he won't talk, so what are we going to do about it?" responded Jerry.

"They'll find his tongue in the course of time," answered Fred. "It takes a sharper man than I think he is to get ahead of the police of New York."

Meantime the man in the chair had spied Jerry, and was looking at him with a curiosity which the boys could not fathom. He did not seem to take any note of the officers; his gaze was riveted on the boy from Jersey; and the question which the young lieutenant fired at him almost drove him from the chair.

"Do you know that boy?" asked the policeman.

"That kid?" exclaimed the man. "No. How should I know him?"

"Did you ever see that man before?"

The lieutenant had turned upon Jerry and addressed himself to him.

Jerry was compelled to shake his head.

"I think I have seen him," spoke out Fred, at this juncture. "I 'caught' his companion on Broadway the other day."

"Who was his companion, Fred, my boy?"

"He has gone by the name of Simon Sharp."

The man in the chair started violently, and his hands clutched the wooden arms.

"I don't know such a person!" he cried. "I never was with a man named Simon Sharp."

Fred took quietly from his pocket the snapshot picture he had secured on Broadway, and handed it to the lieutenant.

"This is Mr. Sharp," said he. "This is the picture I secured on Broadway."

The sharp, black eyes of the prisoner followed the picture as the policeman received it, and all at once he broke into a shrill laugh.

"Oh, I see! The kid goes about with a camera under his coat," he exclaimed, looking at Fred. "No person is safe nowadays with such chaps at work. They ought to have their necks wrung, and—"

"That will do!" interrupted the lieutenant, sternly. "You say you don't know Simon Sharp?"

"That's what I say."

At a sign from the lieutenant the patrolman held the lantern close to the prisoner's face, while the picture was thrust forward for inspection.

The man in the chair looked at the portrait with the utmost *sang froid*, and then grinned.

"He's playing a game; that's plain," whispered Fred to Jerry.

"What's your name?" asked the lieutenant.

"Jasper Paget."

"How came you in the cellar below?"

The lips met resolutely once more, and there was no reply.

"We'll have to lock you up till you've given a full account of yourself. You were found in the cellar of a shop not your own. Mr. Money-fist has disappeared, and there's a mystery which we believe you can clear up."

"What, haven't you arrested Old Hawkbill?" demanded the man.

"Have you a charge to prefer against him?"

"No, though I came near dying by his hands."

"How so?"

"I came here last night to do a bit of legitimate business with him. He's a hard old stick to get along with, as you policemen know. I didn't like his terms, and as I wouldn't come to them, he seized me by the throat and choked me insensible. When I came to, I found myself in darkness, with horrible pains in my limbs and in a little while I relapsed into a state of unconsciousness, and spent the remainder of the night with brief intervals of sensibility. That's the truth, gentlemen. My name, as I've told you, is Jasper Paget. I have rooms on Division, and I repeat that I know no man named Simon Sharp,

and no face like the one you have just shown me."

"What became of the article you brought to Old Hawkbill?"

"I brought nothing," smiled the man, with another glance at Jerry. "I came to talk trade, with nothing to catch the old rascal's eye. Do you think he has gone away because he choked me a little too hard?"

"That is to be found out," was the reply. "Why don't you prefer charges of assault against the old chap?"

"I don't care about spending time on such truck. He would wriggle out of it, and I'd have some cheap notoriety for my pains. By Jove, but I'm hungry."

The police of the great cities do some unaccountable things sometimes, and on this occasion, instead of taking Mr. Paget to the station, they escorted him to the door of Old Hawkbill's shop and let him go.

"Come," said Photograph Fred, clutching Jerry's sleeve. "Our work begins here. We must shadow that fellow, for he is the possessor of the drop shoulder and the man I saw with Simon Sharp. He may have told a straight story of his doings with Old Hawkbill, as far as he went, but he didn't tell the whole truth. Did you see how he eyed you on several occasions?"

"I was watching him all the time," replied Jerry. "The dropped shoulder is plainly visible now. Don't lose him at this stage of the game."

"Not for the world!" asserted Fred. "I caught him when he started off, and now we've got the pair. It may be a long chase, but Mr. Paget is too valuable a person to let slip through our fingers. He may not have taken anything to old Jacob's last night, but I didn't like his look when he made the assertion. He has proven to me beyond doubt that he knows Simon Sharp, and that rascal knows about the stolen diamonds, if not all about your father's fate."

The two boys hastened after Paget, and conducted the shadowing so well that they tracked him to a house in Division street, the door of which he opened with a latch-key.

CHAPTER V.

JERRY JUMP IN THE WEB.

THOUGH the boys watched the house on Division street for some time, the man called Jasper Paget did not oblige them by coming out. He seemed content to remain indoors after his adventure at Old Hawkbill's, and having waited for him long enough, Fred and Jerry went away, promising to come back before long and see what had become of the man they had shadowed.

Melly was on duty at her news-stand and they thought they would drop round and see if she had seen anything of her liberal patron, Simon Sharp; but the girl had nothing new to report.

While they were chatting with her, a man came along and gave Jerry a quick and penetrating look which sent a thrill through the Jersey boy.

"Did you see that?" he exclaimed, turning to Fred. "That man seemed to look me through at a glance. That is the fellow, with the drab coat and the wide shoulders."

"He's built like my patron, but not dressed like him," said Melly. "He always buys a paper when he sees me, but maybe he's a little short this morning."

By this time the man being discussed had reached a spot some distance from the trio, and Fred was about to start after him in order to catch him with the camera, if necessary, when he turned suddenly and came back.

Without noticing the boys he approached the news-box and asked Melly for his morning paper.

Photograph Fred adroitly threw open his coat and in an instant had "caught" him. The stranger folded his paper and tossed a quarter upon the board in front of the girl, who thanked him, though she could not help glancing knowingly at the boys.

"It is Simon Sharp," whispered Jerry. "That is the man who came to Rosedale and put up at the hotel. For heaven's sake, don't let him get away from us; keep him in sight!"

This was unexpected luck, and when the man started off he was shadowed by the boys at careful distance, and eagerly watched by Melly until he was out of sight.

Not far from the scene of the encounter Simon Sharp stopped at a small cigar store and purchased a smoke, after which he sauntered on again enjoying the weed, and apparently unconscious of being followed.

At last he dodged round a corner and when the young shadowers turned it they almost ran against him, for he had stopped and was looking

over the paper. Jerry, who in his eagerness was in the advance, fell back with a light cry which drew the man's attention upon him and the next moment he was addressed by the hunted person.

"See here, I want a boy of your size," said Simon Sharp. "I was on the spur of advertising for one, but if you want a job, I'll give you a trial."

Jerry with rare presence of mind seemed to recover in a flash.

"I'm not particularly in need of a job," said he, "but—"

"But you won't let a good thing slip away, eh?" broke in the man.

The Jersey boy looked at Fred and saw "go" in his eye; then he came closer to Simon Sharp and asked what he had for him to do.

"I want an office boy, one who can write a fair hand. I have a good many letters to be addressed, and the work is light and the pay good. You can handle a pen, can't you? You look smart."

Jerry said that he was not so slow with a pen, and the following minute he was walking away with the man, who towered far above him with his large head and broad shoulders.

"This is luck with a vengeance," exclaimed Fred, catching Jerry and Simon Sharp with the "detective." "I'll hear from Jerry before long, and then we'll know more about the case we're working up. The Jersey boy is in the web of the New York spider; but I guess he's sharp enough to get out."

Let us follow Jerry Jump and see.

Soon after picking up the boy in search of his father, Simon Sharp put his paper in his pocket as if he had suddenly lost all interest in it, and turned his attention to Jerry. The boy walked nimbly along, easily keeping pace with his new acquaintance and taking notice of the route they were traversing.

After turning several squares the pair reached a building in the middle of a block and Simon conducted his companion up two flights of steps to a back room.

"We can't always get rooms in front," he explained, "so we have to put up with some inconveniences. This is where I do business."

Jerry wondered what sort of "business" he did, for he saw no signs of any about the room, and while he wondered, Simon Sharp opened a drawer in an old-fashioned table and produced a box of envelopes.

"Sure enough, he's got some addressing to do," thought the Jersey boy, and just then Simon turned and beckoned him forward.

"When did you come to the city?" asked the suspected man.

Jerry started.

"You see I can tell a tenderfoot," continued Simon, with a smile. "We city people are excellent observers of human nature, and don't miss it once in a thousand times. You haven't been here long?"

"Not very long, sir," answered Jerry. "Do you want me to go to work right away?"

The boy had taken a seat at the table and was in the act of picking up a pen which lay near.

A strange look came into Simon Sharp's eyes. He seemed on the eve of saying something, but suddenly checked himself, and Jerry appeared to catch a gleam of triumph in his look.

"Yes, go to work," said he. "Here's the list," and he spread before Jerry a list of names which was quite long and new, fresh from a List Agency, the boy had no doubt.

Anxious to conceal his face, which he was afraid Simon Sharp might recognize, Jerry went to work, keeping his chin close to the table and paying much attention to his task. It appeared to him that Simon Sharp had stepped back and was eying him like a hawk, though he did not look up to see just what he was about.

"You'll have employment there for a time," suddenly continued the man. "Copy the addresses carefully and I'll look at your work when I come back."

He heard the man walk across the room and strike a match; then he caught the fragrance of a fresh cigar which vanished with Simon through the door.

Jerry almost sprung erect when he found himself alone in the den of the city spider. Had he really found the man who had stolen his father's diamonds, and the villain who knew what had become of that parent? Had he fallen into a net spread by the spider for his destruction? And was he to remain a prisoner in that room until Simon Sharp, and probably his friend, Jasper Paget, could determine what should be done with him?

These thoughts went like wildfire through Jerry's brain. He had heard Simon Sharp go

down the steps and his footfalls had died away; and he was the sole occupant of the little back room!

All at once he threw down the pen and sprung up. He ran to the door and grasped the knob. It would turn, but the door did not open. He had been locked in!

"In a trap sure enough!" cried Jerry. "This is what I get for allowing myself to be roped in by a first-class rascal. This is just the opportunity Simon Sharp has been looking for. I wonder if Photograph Fred followed us? No, he went back; I remember now."

The Jersey boy went to the window and saw that it looked out upon a cramped back-yard. He tried the lower sash but it would not move.

"If I escape I won't make any discoveries," thought Jerry. "I came with Simon Sharp to find out all I could, and I've discovered nothing yet. I guess I'll stay and brave the spider a little longer. This man knows something. What did Melly say about his wearing a big diamond? I won't try to escape yet, but will stay here till the man comes back."

Jerry went back to the table and took up the pen once more.

He did not seem in any hurry to complete his task, but slowly addressed the envelopes, copying from the list. He was doing this when he heard a footstep in the hall.

"He soon returned," said Jerry to himself, thinking of Simon Sharp. "I don't want him to think that I've put in any time nosing round," and he went to work while a key clicked in the lock and the door opened.

Taking it for granted that the person who had entered the room was Simon Sharp, Jerry did not look up until he heard a sharp "hello!" when he paused in his work and raised his head.

If the dead had come to life before him he would not have been more surprised than he was by the apparition near the table.

Mr. Jasper Paget, the late prisoner of Old Hawkbill's cellar, was standing at his elbow!

"By the jumping jingo! when did you come here?" exclaimed the man, as much startled as the Jersey boy. "I'd as soon look for Davy Crockett here as you. Why, I left you—"

He broke his own sentence as if he was getting on dangerous ground, and falling back he stared at Jerry, as though he was not sure that the encounter was an episode in real life.

"I'm employed by Mr. Sharp," said Jerry.

"You are? Hired by him to address circulars? Where did he run across you?"

"We met accidentally on the street. He was looking for a boy, and I came in handy."

It seemed to Jerry that Jasper Paget did not know whether to laugh or swear.

"Picked you up on the street? Luck, luck! Well, this beats my time all to pieces. Where is he?"

"He went out awhile ago."

"Say when he would be back, eh?"

"He did not."

Jasper looked once more at Jerry, this time with a cunning light in the depths of his eyes, and then moved toward the door.

"There's a good deal of the snake in that man," ran through the Jersey boy's mind. "I believe he's really more dangerous than Simon Sharp if let alone. I wish Fred could hear of this encounter."

Mear time Paget had reached the door, but all at once he came back, and laid one hand on his shoulder.

"Say, don't tell him that I called, will you?" he said.

"Not if you desire silence," was the reply.

"It's not necessary for him to know it," continued Paget. "You see, I come rather often, and it's not worth while to tell him every time. You won't mention it, eh?"

"I won't," promised Jerry, and with a "thank you," the man went back to the door again and went out.

The moment the portal was shut, the young hunter sprung across the room and leaned against the door, for Jasper Paget was muttering to himself in the hall.

"Great Jehosaphat! who'd have thought it?" he heard the man say. "Ran across him on the street, too! Got him in the trap slick and clean! First one pigeon and then another. It's robbing the nest completely. If I hadn't met with my misfortune last night, I'd be a thousand better off than I am; but the old hawk was too much for Baldy Paget. I've got to play another game, but, thank fortune, there's more nest eggs where I found the one I lost. The brain is still at work, and all we have to do is to keep him busy. But the boy inside? I wonder what Simon intends to do with him? I know what I'd do, ha, ha!" and the laugh that rippled over

Paget's lips sent a cold chill to Jerry Jump's heart, as the man went down the stair and out into the street below.

CHAPTER VI. NUMBER 398.

PHOTOGRAPH FRED saw Jerry Jump depart with Simon Sharp with some misgivings, but when he remembered that the young Jerseyite was naturally shrewd, and, therefore, able to take care of himself, he decided not to follow the pair, and went back to Melly at the news-stand.

He was not there a great while when "Baldy" Paget came sauntering that way, and Fred saw him at once. Telling Melly that there came the man who had been found in Old Hawkbill's cellar, he waited till Paget passed, when he followed him. He was anxious to see where he went, as the man with the dropped shoulder seemed to have something important on his mind.

Instead of proceeding to his lodgings on Division street, Photograph Fred's quarry led him into another thoroughfare and halted in front of a house which had a suspicious look. Just as the door was opened to admit Mr. Paget, Fred managed to get a negative of the scene, and then the portal closed on his game.

"He's got more than one nest, I see," thought the boy when he had watched the house awhile. "I would like to know who inhabits the building, and I'll see what is to be found out by a little bit of strategy."

Nearly opposite the house was a small grocery which Fred found conducted by a large, round-faced woman named Mrs. Miggs, who fell upon him like a vulture the moment he crossed the threshold. The Camera Sharp drew back as if afraid of his life.

"I don't like boys unless they come here on business," said the Amazon.

"Then I guess you'll take a fancy to me," replied Fred, at the same time taking a quarter from his pocket.

From among the candies displayed in a lot of dirty jars, the young detective purchased enough to open the business on which he had entered the store.

When he had succeeded in getting Mrs. Miggs in a communicative mood, he ventured to inquire after the house across the street.

"No. 398, is it?" smiled the woman. "I don't know much about it, but sometimes I wish I knew more."

"Then there's some mystery connected with it, is there?"

"Something strange, anyway," was the reply.

"I like mysteries myself—like to read about them, you know. But to find a real one is better than reading it, I think. Then you don't know who lives in 398?"

"I do not."

"But you see some people go in, I suppose?"

"Sometimes."

"I saw a man enter awhile ago."

"I wonder which one it was."

"Then more than one man comes to the house?"

"I've seen two of them," said Mrs. Miggs. "Johnny says he's heard strange sounds in the old place."

"Who's Johnny?"

"My son. He's an inquiring boy though he don't mean any harm by it."

Fred found that his candy was exhausted and made another purchase in hopes that Johnny himself would show up, or still further loosen Mrs. Miggs's tongue.

"The other night Johnny was across the street and heard some man inside of No. 398, hammering on an anvil with a little steel hammer. Of course his curiosity was aroused and he managed to get up to one of the back windows and look into the house. He had just the merest crack for his work, but Johnny's got good eyes and they are always on the alert. Well, he saw the man hammering on the anvil with the little hammer."

"What did he look like?" eagerly inquired Fred.

"He was an old man with a long gray beard, and Johnny says that he seemed to be bent almost double at the anvil. He had a lot of queer looking wheels and things about him, but there he was, hammering on the anvil and never looking up, but working all the time. Presently a clock hanging along the wall opened and out came a skeleton man with a horn in his hand. Johnny felt the cold sweat on his forehead for he always was afraid of spooks and such things. When the skeleton had come out of the clock it bowed to the man at the anvil and then placed

the horn to its fleshless mouth and blew nine times, for it was just nine o'clock at the time."

"Well, what happened then?"

"Why, the man put aside his hammer and the skeleton went back into the clock. Then the workman placed his work in a drawer, took off his apron and put out the lights. Johnny came home and it was some time before he could tell me about the sights he had discovered. Now don't you think I'm anxious to know more about the people who live in No. 398?"

"I don't wonder at your curiosity," answered Fred. "I'd like to know more myself. Do you think Johnny and I could find out something if we went pards in the business?"

"I don't think there's money enough in New York to induce Johnny to cooter round that house any more. He says he don't want anything to do with skeletons that can blow a horn and tell the time of night. If you want to discover anything, I guess you'll have to go about it without Johnny Miggs."

"Isn't there a lady connected with No. 398?" asked Photograph Fred.

"I did see a woman at the window, but that was some months ago, and then I saw her but once."

"Was she young looking?"

"Not very from what I could see of her."

"Then, she never comes out?"

"If she does it's when I'm not looking."

"What about the men who go there?"

"One's a big man and the other not quite so large. One is almost a giant, and the other has a defect which spots him wherever he goes. He has a low shoulder."

"Mr. Paget!" smiled Fred to himself. "Of course the big man is Simon Sharp."

At this juncture a good-sized boy came into the store, and Mrs. Miggs at once informed Fred that the young gentleman who did not like skeletons had come in, and the young detective turned his attention to him.

Photograph Fred at once ingratiated himself into Johnny Miggs's confidence, and the two strolled into a small park which was in the vicinity and Fred began to pump Johnny about his adventure behind the suspicious house.

Young Miggs was quite anxious to relate the adventure with the usual embellishments, and Fred drew from him a good description of the man at the little anvil. Johnny said that sometimes the man would stop and pass his hand across his forehead, as if trying to think of something he had forgotten, and that he looked haggard and overworked.

When asked if he would mind paying another visit to the house for the purpose of making still further discoveries, Johnny turned pale and said that he was afraid of skeletons which blew horns, and that he would rather not repeat his adventure.

After awhile Fred, with another look at the house and an inward resolution to see for himself the coming night, went away, promising to tell Johnny Miggs, if he discovered anything, and getting in return the boy's promise to keep his eyes open and see who entered and left the building.

Photograph Fred thought that the mystery that overhung Thomas Jump's disappearance was near a solution, and when he went home for a brief rest and to leave word there for Jerry, should he get away from Simon Sharp, it was with a head full of exciting things.

Having told his mother what to tell the young Jerseyite should he come back, he went out once more, taking with him the detective camera, his inseparable companion.

Fred was always on the lookout for subjects, and as he turned into the Bowery, he caught sight of a man whose face looked familiar, while he appeared to be disguised.

"As sure as I live, that's Old Hawkbill!" mentally exclaimed the Camera Sharp, spotting the man in a twinkling. "He's afraid to go back to the shop he deserted, probably because he thinks he killed the man in the cellar. 'I'd like to know what brought Jasper Paget to his shop!' and he turned and followed the man whose walk gave him way."

"Hello, Jacob!" saluted Fred, coming up with the old man, and looking up into the startled face suddenly revealed. "I know you and I've got some news which I think you'd like to hear; but I don't want to tell it where we are just now."

The old man, undoubtedly Old Hawkbill, looked at Fred a moment and seemed to read his very thoughts.

"I'm in dead earnest," continued the young detective. "Let's drop into Davy's here and talk. We can take the little back room and not be molested."

"Come along, then," was the reply, and the

strange pair slid into a little place and were permitted to pass through to a small room in the rear of it.

"What in the world are you running about in this shape for?" asked Fred, smiling at the old man's disguise. "You're perfectly safe. The man's all right. He is out of the house and the police ain't going to molest you."

Old Hawkbill took a long breath of relief.

"What does he say?" he gasped.

"Not much of anything. He's glad to get out of the cellar and I guess he won't come any more to your shop."

"Did he say why he came the last time? What did he tell the police, anyhow?"

"Said he came on legitimate business."

A queer smile transformed Old Hawkbill's countenance.

"I b'lieve I'll go back and open up again," said he.

"Only you'll be careful how you deal with some people, eh?"

"Yes. That man tried to bleed me—wanted to sell me a bit of machinery for—well, for more than I wanted to give."

"He intimated that you tried to choke him."

"With these hands?" and the old rascal held out his hands which were long and skeleton-like.

"Why, I'm an old man, boy, and he has the frame of a lion. Me choke him? You make me laugh."

Old Jacob fell back in his chair and burst into a laugh, and at the same moment Fred's coat parted and he got another picture.

"I think I see a connection between the man at the anvil and Jasper Paget's visit to Old Hawkbill's shop," decided Fred, when he found himself on the street once more after his interview with Jacob. "He says Jasper wanted to sell him a bit of machinery for more than it was worth. Now, who made the machine? Why, the man Johnny Miggs saw at the anvil in 398. And the man is—I can't think otherwise—he must be Jerry Jump's missing father, in the web of the two rascals."

Fred Paster went home and waited nearly all day for Jerry or news from him, but none came.

As the warm afternoon closed he went out again slightly disguised and bent his steps toward the house which he wanted to explore. He did not possess Johnny Miggs's fear of skeletons, and it was not long ere he reached the vicinity of the 398 mystery.

"I'm afraid you're too late," said a voice at his side, and looking down he saw Johnny there, with a grin on his dirty face.

"Too late for what?"

"Why, to see the man who works till the skeleton blows his horn. He has gone off."

"Gone off?" gasped Fred.

"Yes. The big man who comes to the house took him off in a carriage a while ago."

The Camera Sharp could not help smiling. Simon Sharp had outwitted him.

CHAPTER VII.

FRED HEARS A STARTLING STORY.

FRED PASTER was so astonished that he could only look first at Johnny Miggs and then at the house which he expected to examine, in hopes of finding a solution of the mystery it contained.

"I happened to see 'em go off," continued the boy. "I don't think the big man wanted anybody to notice him, but I'm always on hand, and saw him this time. They went off together. The big man carried down the steps a box, which he put in the carriage after the old chap got in, and away they went."

"In which direction, Johnny?"

"They turned that corner, but, of course, I don't know where they went after that, as I did not follow."

"Didn't you want to follow, Johnny?"

"Not very bad!" admitted the boy, shrugging his shoulders. "I can't get over that skeleton blowing a horn before the clock, and mebbe the man what made it was the one who went off in the vehicle with the other one."

Photograph Fred felt his defeat keenly. He was sure that Simon Sharp had removed the mysterious inmate of No. 398 to another part of the city for safety. Had he discovered that he (Fred) was on his track? Had Jasper Paget, who was undoubtedly his friend and partner in the dark business on hand, acquainted him with the encounter at Old Hawkbill's? Fred was inclined to believe that the big rascal had been warned.

When he found that he could get nothing more from Johnny Miggs, he sauntered past the old house and eyed it closely. He longed to get beyond its portal, for there might be some clew

to his chase there. The more he looked at the house, the deeper became his desire to enter.

Half an hour later the young Camera Sharp came back, but this time he dodged into a neighboring alley, and soon found himself in the back yard attached to the suspected house, and quickly reached the window where Miggs had made his startling discoveries.

He found the shutter slightly ajar, and in a little while he had opened it sufficiently to raise the sash, after which success he drew his body over the sill and got into the dark room ahead.

Not until then did he think of the woman whom Mrs. Miggs had seen at the front door, then he paused, as he did not want to encounter any one after entering the house like a burglar.

Photograph Fred stood in the dark some time trying to decide on his future movements, when, all at once, a door was flung open directly before him and the shriek of a female rung in his ears!

The young detective could not repress a smile at the woman's terror, for she was as white as a sheet and almost dropped the light she carried. She fell against the wall, gasping for breath, and staring at Fred as if her eyes would fly from her head.

"I'm no robber," remarked Fred, reassuringly, as he stepped forward. "I came here by accident, really thought I was getting into my aunt's house, and intended to surprise the old lady, you know."

The frightened woman got a little courage at this and breathed easier.

"You're a boy, ain't you?" she asked. "When I first saw you you looked as tall as Goliath and just as fierce. There's nothing in this house to take now since he went away, and I'm glad he's gone."

"Oh, you're alone then?"

"I am now but it hasn't been very long that way," was the reply.

"Did you have boarders?"

"I had one."

"He didn't find fault with your cooking, I hope?"

"It wasn't that," grinned the woman, who was a spare creature with a pale, sad-looking face which impressed Fred from the start.

"They took him off against his will."

"Hadh't he a mind of his own?"

"Not on some things," answered the woman.

"But, you're in no hurry to find your aunt, are you?"

"I'm not in a great hurry. She knows I'm all right wherever I am, and I've always turned up safe heretofore."

The woman invited Fred into another room and when he had entered she closed the door and locked it.

"I want to tell somebody something," said she. "I don't want to be a party to a crime. It isn't my nature; but sometimes you know we can't help ourselves."

The boy spotter said that such was often the case, and he wondered what the woman would say next.

"My name is Sarah Sackett. I am a widow. My husband fell among bad men some years ago and, to help him out, I did that which I should not have done. In other words, I, too, violated the law. Well, time passed and my husband came back—I need not tell you from where. I thought that the past would be forgotten and that we would be happy again. Our happiness however was brief. Once more the man who had been the cause of John Sackett's ruin came forward and he fell into his clutches, as before. I tried to keep him from evil, but he was in the power of his evil genius, and just when he was trying to do well he fell again, this time for good. He died before they could find him for another crime, and I was alone in the world."

"You would think perhaps that the man who had been the cause of our misfortunes would not think of me, poor widow; but he had kept track of me all along. He had a companion who sometimes helped him in his villainies, and one day I discovered that I was again in his power. He came to me and said that he had a friend who would come and board with me, and I had to consent, for he held the past over my head, like a coward. Well, he brought the man one night and from that hour to the time when he took him away in a closed carriage, he was my strange guest."

"Was he like the man who brought him to your house?" queried the boy sharp.

"Not at all," the woman hastened to say.

"He was the strangest person you ever saw."

"He was all the time making little things with wheels, springs and the like. He could do anything in that line, knew all about mechanics, and made me some funny things while here. Why, he once made a clock that had a skeleton

man in it and when the hour was to be struck the door in front of the pendulum would open and the skeleton would come forth and blow the time on a tiny horn."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Fred, at the same time thinking of Johnny Miggs's experience.

"He never was idle only when he slept and then it seemed to me that his brain was the busiest, for when he awoke he went right to work, and was sure to produce something new. I soon began to suspect that the man was insane on certain subjects, and once when I mentioned about a lot of diamonds which I saw in a show-window down-town, he sprung from his work-chair and declared that they were his—that they had been stolen from him a long time ago. I thought he would rave till the people outside heard him, but, just then, Mr. Sharp came in, and my boarder calmed down right away. I never saw any one have the power over a human being that Simon Sharp seemed to have over him. When Mr. Sharp got a chance he took me to one side and told me never to say diamonds in his presence again. I tell you that something was wrong about that man being in my house. He was in the grip of the same men who ruined my husband and made my own life a burden. 'Tis true I'm rid of my guest, but I hated to see him go, for he was good company, though I could not get him to refer to his past life. He seemed to have forgotten it."

"Did he want to go away with Simon Sharp?" asked Fred.

"No, but he submitted when Mr. Sharp insisted."

"Couldn't you discover anything at all about his past life?"

"I tried to pump him many times, but every one I was baffled somehow. He had a queer way of passing his hand over his forehead, as if his memory was deficient. I caught him at it when he was alone. Would you like to see where he worked?"

"I would like nothing better, for your story has interested me in your boarder."

Sarah Sackett took the lamp and led the way into a small room. It had no carpet and there was a work-bench on one side.

"They took all his tools with them," explained the woman. "Mr. Sharp carried them away in a box. You see they made a clean sweep of everything."

Photograph Fred, who was looking around, nodded. He could see nothing that promised to lighten the mystery surrounding the strange workman.

"What did he do with what he made?" suddenly asked the boy.

"Oh, as fast as they were finished either Mr. Sharp or his friend would come and take them away. They looked like machines on a very small scale, but they were perfection, every wheel was in its place, for he finished them with great care. I never saw a man like him."

"Didn't he do any writing? I would suppose that he would get some letters."

"Bless you no. He never wanted to know what was going on outside of this house. Don't you think from what I've told you that he wasn't exactly right in the upper story?"

"It looks that way to me," answered Fred. "Of course you don't know whether Simon Sharp took him?"

"That's his secret, not mine," laughed Sarah Sackett. "I hope I am rid of the spiders at last. I feel like a new woman already. But, I can't help thinking about my late boarder whose name I never heard; he seemed to have forgotten it himself, but he didn't forget how to make wonderful things like skeleton horn-blowers and the like. I feel better since telling you what I have. I wish they could find that poor man and take him from the power of Simon Sharp and his partner. I'll never help them again in their villainies. I wish you had come a little sooner, for then you could have seen for yourself."

The young Camera Sharp wished so too, and frankly told the woman so. He now realized what had escaped him by a few hours; but he had found a sure clue to Jerry Jump's father, and resolved, while he listened to the widow, not to relinquish it until the rascals had been gathered in, and the great wrong righted.

"I don't know about another nest controlled by Simon Sharp," said the woman. "Of course he has taken the victim to another place. Maybe he grew suspicious of me; I don't know. If you want to find the victim of the conspiracy you'll have to watch the pair; but I want to caution you to beware of both! They will stoop to anything. My husband used to say that Simon Sharp had no heart, and I'm sure his companion is no better."

Fred assured Sarah Sackett that he would look out for number one, and thanking her for her information, went back to the open window and left the house.

"More news for Jerry. He may be at the house by this time. He said he would slip away from Simon Sharp as soon as he could, and he ought to be on hand; and the young detective flitted through the streets and bounded up the stair leading to his lodgings."

Jerry had not returned, and when Mrs. Paster told him that she had seen nothing of the Jersey boy, a fear smote his heart.

"What if Jerry, too, is in the clutches of the two scoundrels who have his father in their trap?" he exclaimed, and to his mother's surprise he rushed out of the house without explaining his startling haste.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENTRAPPING HIMSELF.

THE Camera Sharp knew that Melly's day's work was over, and that if he wanted to see her he would have to go to her quiet lodgings. He accordingly bent his steps in that direction, and ere long surprised the newsgirl at her frugal and rather late supper.

Always in a happy mood, Melly was delighted to see Fred, and immediately inquired after Jerry, whose absence she at once noticed.

Fred's reply embraced all he knew about the Jersey boy's absence, and Melly listened with absorbing interest. She, too, feared that Jerry had been lured into a trap by Simon Sharp whom she had not seen since selling him a paper, though she was sure that Jasper Paget, the man with the dropped shoulder, had passed her stand just before her closing hour.

"Fred," said Melly as the young detective was about to take his departure, "I hope you will keep up the hunt till you've found not only our friend Jerry, but his father also."

"Don't let that bother you, Melly. I've enlisted for the war, and I propose to stay in the fight till it is finished. Find Jerry? Why, of course I'll find him, and his father, too. I expect the rascals have got away with some of the diamonds, but it'll be victory enough to restore Thomas Jump to his family; and that means, you know, the baffling of two scamps who have been at large long enough."

Fred Paster was in a brown study when he reached the street. He had a number of friends on the secret detective force, men whom he had helped with his little camera, and he could secure the assistance of half a dozen; but he had resolved not to ask for it.

"I'll see what I can do without them," was his decision. "They'd want more than half the glory, and I want to get along all by myself for once."

He went from Melly's abode to the last place to which he had traced Jasper Paget. He hoped that fortune would favor him in some manner, and throw him back on the trail which now seemed lost.

As he approached the house he saw the door open and the next moment Mr. Paget himself stepped upon the pavement. This was a bit of luck that delighted Fred.

In an instant he had drawn back into the shadow of a brick house and watched Paget come forward at a brisk pace. When the man had passed him he dropped quietly upon his trail and was soon playing shadow to perfection.

"Baldy" Paget walked several squares and dropped into a store presided over by a small man who had but one eye, but it was enough, it was so black and keen; and Fred, drawing near, saw him pick up an evening paper and lean against the counter for a perusal of some of its contents. It seemed to the Camera Sharp that Mr. Paget was waiting for some one, for he did not seem very much interested in the paper, and every now and then would glance out as if he had caught the sound of a familiar step.

Presently some one brushed the young detective and the next minute Paget dropped the paper and came out. The two met under the lamp, and Fred saw the greeting that passed between them.

The man whom Paget met was not so tall as he; besides, he was younger and looked like a gay frequenter of the parks. Photograph Fred now saw him for the first time, and regretted that it was night, for he would liked to have "caught" him with his "detective."

After awhile Paget and the young man walked away, followed by the boy spy, and were tracked to a wine-shop in the vicinity. They

entered, talking in low tones to one another, but soon came forth and hailed a cab.

When the vehicle came up to the curb to let them get in, Fred glided nearer, and when the cab started off he swung himself under the back of it and clung to the undergearing for dear life. Perhaps it was not the first ride of the kind he had taken, and he knew how to hold on.

The cab jolted over the stones for some time to a confused murmur of voices from within, and the young rider was fearing that he was to be taken to the outskirts of the city, when it suddenly stopped in a dark street, and the two men got out.

"Is it another nest?" asked Fred of himself. "In fortune's name, how many webs have the spiders?"

He did not drop from his uncomfortable position until the cab had proceeded some distance, when he went back and easily found the house into which Paget had let himself and companion.

He saw a light in the front part of the building, but could not look into the room for the shutters which were tightly closed.

"I want to see what is beyond the window; that's what I'm here for," said Fred, somewhat disappointed. "Mr. Paget and his dudish companion are up to some crooked work, and I ought to know what it is."

Finding that he could not see anything from a front observation, the spy went to the rear of the cramped lot and boldly scaled the close fence. He dropped down into a small yard and immediately crept toward the house.

If the front part of the house was observation proof, the young detective was more fortunate in the rear, for he found a door which promptly admitted him to the basement, and in a short time he was feeling his way up a dark stair, to find a door, which he opened without trouble.

He was now fairly in the same house occupied by Jasper Paget and his friend, and going further, he heard their voices in an adjoining room. He wondered why he had not disturbed any one, but he was to suddenly enlighten himself, and that in a very disagreeable manner.

While Fred was not permitted to see the two men who were in the room just beyond the door, he could listen to what they were saying, and had just begun to catch their words when the portal opened, and he fell back discovered.

"By Jove, I thought so!" exclaimed the man who presented himself to the astonished boy. "It didn't sound very much like a rat to me. It's the chap I saw when I had been carried up from Old Hawkbill's dungeon by the cops," and at once Photograph Fred was seized and dragged into the room for the young man's inspection.

"Was he really listening, Baldy?" "He was doing nothing else, and I feel like wringing his neck."

By this time Fred had been forced into a chair and the next thing Mr. Paget did was to draw his jacket to one side in search of the hidden camera, which, to his disappointment, he did not find.

"He's not got his face trap along, but he's the same boy," the crook averred.

Fred maintained a provoking silence. "We want to be sure of it, Baldy," was the answer. "These Arabs look very much alike, you know. I've seen them in droves and you can't tell one from t'other."

"Haven't I got a good pair o' peepers?" demanded Paget. "I ought to know a marked rat when I see him. This is the one I say. Aren't you, boy?"

"You seem certain of it," replied Fred. "Where did you say you had met me?"

"At Old Hawkbill's."

"What were you doing there?" "Never mind that. I saw you there, and you know it."

There was no reply to this; Fred seemed to bury his toes in the carpet.

"We can't stay here all night," put in the young man. "I have an engagement, and it's getting close to the time. You can leave him gagged in the chair. A capital idea, by Jove!"

Paget seemed to approve of the suggestion, for he rummaged in the table drawer for a cord, and finding one at last came toward the boy with it dangling before his eyes.

"You don't tie me in that chair," cried the Camera Sharp, springing from it, as if sent upward by electric springs.

The young man fell back with a cry.

"Silence!" commanded Paget. "We don't want any more outsiders here. One's enough."

The boy had, on the instant, seized a light chair, near at hand, and when Paget advanced upon him he was in an attitude of defiance.

"You have no right to keep me here!" he exclaimed. "I was doing my duty and you shall not molest or detain me."

"Hear him!" cried the young man. "He's been playing spy on us, and may belong to the police, the young scamp!"

"That's just where he does belong. Let him get away and we won't rest easy from now on. Advance upon him from the left there, and if he makes a motion to use the chair, he'll wish he had never seen me."

The young man was not very anxious to come in contact with the leg of a chair, but spurred on by Paget, he made a sudden movement toward the defiant detective, when, down came the uplifted weapon and the dude went back against the wall with a loud cry, though he had barely been touched.

Fred felt like following up his advantage, and might have spoiled the young fellow's face if "Baldy" had not thrown himself forward and caught the chair.

Though the young detective struggled bravely, he found the man too much for him, and after several ineffectual attempts to get away, he was firmly grasped, and then forced back into the arm-chair near the table.

There he was held until he was tied fast and when the act had been performed Jasper Paget fell back and laughed triumphantly.

"That's the way I treat spies," he cried. "I guess you're safe the rest of the night, and till I come and let you loose, for that matter. Come, Tatsy, we'll finish the business."

Fred saw the two crooks go back to the table where they put their heads together and talked in low tones, too low for him to hear a word. Every now and then the young man would look toward him as if he half-pitied his condition; but Paget would soon call him back to the business in hand.

The secret affair was at last concluded and the two rose.

"Good-night!" grinned "Baldy," reaching up to the jet burning above the table. "You'll have lots of company ere long. They're big fellows, too, ha, ha!"

The Camera Sharp made no reply but watched the men as they withdrew, and he was the sole tenant of a room as dark as the chamber in the Pyramid. The last act of Paget was to bind a handkerchief over the captive's mouth, and though he could breathe, he could not cry for help.

Fred had to confess that this didn't look much like solving the Jump Mystery.

CHAPTER IX.

A VILLAIN'S PROPOSITION.

LET us leave Fred in his unenviable situation and return to Jerry Jump, whom we left in Simon Sharp's web with the ejaculations of "Baldy" Paget ringing in his ears.

It was some time before Jerry could compose himself, and he did not go back to the task of addressing the envelopes until nearly an hour had passed. Then he went to work so as to make a showing when Simon returned, but that slippery scamp did not seem in a hurry to come back.

Time wore on and the day faded once more. Jerry lit the gas and was completing his work when there were footsteps at the door and he felt that the main spider of the web had come back.

As the key turned softly in the lock the boy turned his head and saw the door slowly open. In walked Simon Sharp with the swagger of one not entirely sober.

There was a half-angry gleam in the dark eyes of the scamp, and Jerry wondered if the work he had done would please him.

Coming up to the table, the big fellow ran his eyes over the pile of envelopes and asked if the task was completed.

"As you see, sir, I haven't another to address," said the Jersey boy.

"That's all right," replied Simon. "You needn't work any more to-night."

"Then I suppose I can go out and get a bite."

Simon Sharp wheeled upon the boy and gave him a fierce look.

"Mebbe you wouldn't come back," he exclaimed.

"Why shouldn't I?"

The big fellow laughed.

"Yes, why shouldn't you? That's what I'd like to know."

Jerry made no reply for a moment.

It was very plain to him that he was not going to get out without Mr. Sharp's consent.

After awhile the big fellow went to the win-

dow and looked down into the street below. Jerry was watching him like a cat, ready to take advantage of any movement which would let him escape from the man's clutches. But Simon was also on the watch, and did not intend to give the boy a chance to get away until he was done with him.

Suddenly the sharper came toward the boy and told him to sit down as he wanted to talk to him.

Jerry obeyed. "How did you leave the folks in Jersey?" asked Simon, with a curious leer.

The boy prisoner started. It was the first time the sharp had given him to understand that he knew his identity.

"Maybe I didn't come from Jersey at all," retorted the boy.

"Don't tell me that, for I know better," replied Simon. "I knew you the moment I saw you on the street, and I might as well be plain as not. You are from Jersey and I know all about you. But you haven't told me how you left the folks."

"I left my mother broken-hearted, if you must know the truth. You are Simon Sharp, the man who came to Rosedale and stopped at the hotel several days."

The crook burst into a boisterous laugh which he suddenly checked and leaned toward the young Jerseyite, whom he studied a moment very closely.

"So I am Simon Sharp, eh?" he drawled in a ludicrous manner of speech. "Well, then, you think you don't know much good of me?"

"Not a great deal of good, if what I suspect be true," rejoined Jerry. "Where are the diamonds, Mr. Sharp?"

If a bomb had dropped through the ceiling and fallen at the rascal's feet, he would not have started more than he did at the boy's words.

"You don't want to accuse me of any crookedness!" he cried, seizing Jerry's shoulder and sinking his hands into it. "This is my house and I won't stand any accusations in it. What do I know about diamonds, I'd like to know?"

So sure was the boy that his arrow had gone straight to the mark that he looked the scoundrel firmly in the eye.

"I don't take anything back that I have said because it may not please you," said he. "I am looking for those diamonds, as you must know, if you know that I am Jerry Jump of Rosedale. Besides this, I am also looking for my father, who followed them off almost as mysteriously. I have devoted my life to the task before me."

"Hunting for a father and a lot of diamonds, ho! ho!" exclaimed Simon Sharp. "When do you expect to find them?"

"Probably when I have run to earth the rascals who carried out the infamous plot."

The color that came to the big man's face was quite enough to alarm the boy from Jersey. Simon Sharp looked the tiger that he was, and his eyes flashed like twin balls of fire.

Then his demeanor suddenly changed: he dropped into a chair and crossed his legs, inserted his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and leered at Jerry in a most insulting manner.

"I guess you've got a big contract on hand," said he. "I would think so if I had it. One would think from your remarks that you had a suspicion as to who carried off the Jersey diamonds and the Jersey father."

Jerry's blood seemed to boil in his veins. He felt like braining the scoundrel with a chair, a feat which looked easy of accomplishment at that moment.

"What reward do you offer?" asked Simon with a wicked smile at his mouth.

"I offer none. You know that we cannot offer a reward for the theft of the gems which, with father's disappearance, has rendered us poor."

"Oh, I understand; pleading the poverty act," sneered the crook. "You'd compromise on half, wouldn't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You would take back one half of the gems and be satisfied."

"Solve the mystery that surrounds my father and keep all the diamonds!" was the answer. "Restore him to us and you may retain the gems. He is worth more to our little broken-hearted household than all the wealth of the world."

"That's pretty cool!" retorted Simon. "You seem to think that I have had a hand in the business."

"Prove that you had not. Prove that you don't know how the diamonds vanished, and that you can tell nothing about my father, and I will apologize. Heaven forgive me, Simon

Sharp, if I have misjudged you; but I must believe that you know more than you will tell."

"In other words, that I stole the diamonds and afterward had a hand in your parent's disappearance?"

"That is my belief," was the calm rejoinder, and the boy as he spoke looked the big scamp squarely in the eye. "I say that you and another man, who is not unknown to me, are responsible for this state of affairs, and that there is coming a day of vengeance when the guilty shall be punished and all made clear."

Simon Sharp sprung from his chair and stepped toward Jerry Jump, who involuntarily fell back.

"I'll crush you before you sting me! Do you hear that?" he exclaimed. "I don't intend to have any young vipers crawling over my path. I'm no fool when my interests are at stake. You hope vengeance will overtake me, do you? Well, that is just what it won't do. You don't get out of here till I open the door, and that may not be very soon."

Jerry was ready to think this highly probable, but he was not going to show that he thought as much, and Sharp looked at him as if he considered him a human enigma.

"I'll bring you your supper," said the villain, moving toward the door. "When I come back I'll have a proposition to make and you want to consider it carefully."

"Why not make it now?" asked Jerry.

"No, I won't," was the decisive response.

"Wait till I come back."

Simon carefully unlocked the door and slipped out, leaving Jerry once more alone. He had broken the ice between him and the rascal and was now sure, if he had any doubts before, that he was on the right trail, and longed to acquaint Photograph Fred with his discoveries; but, the question that puzzled him was: How am I to get out of this web?

It seemed to him that Simon had deserted him for good, but the fellow was attending to his own appetite in a neighboring restaurant, and not until he had satisfied it did he think of Jerry. At last the boy prisoner heard footsteps on the stair; then the door opened and Simon came in, carrying a basket in which was a good supper.

When it had been placed before him, Jerry fell to without ceremony, while the city crook sat back and watched him with much interest. He seemed to take delight in contemplating the victim he had captured, as if mentally calculating how much the victory was worth to him.

Jerry thinking of the proposition that was to be made to him, hurried through his meal and when he had finished he glanced at Simon and waited for him to talk.

"I s'pose you're waiting for the proposition?" said Simon with a smirk.

"You didn't think I had forgotten it, did you?"

"Well, hardly. I want you to consider it well and not jump at an answer. We were speaking about the lost diamonds, you remember? Some of them might get back into your till if you act decent and show a disposition to play fair. You say you are poor."

"We are poor," answered Jerry.

"So much the better for the proposition," continued Simon. "You need not continue in poverty, but can have a good time of it if you will only look at my proposition in a business light."

Jerry said nothing. It seemed to him that the scamp was just trying to torture him.

"Now my proposition is this: I will agree to see that you get back some of those very diamonds—enough to put you and your mother in easy circumstances—if on the other hand you will swear not to follow this so-called trail any longer."

A short silence followed the proposition.

"You mean that I am not to look for my father any longer, don't you?"

"He may be dead, so what would a hunt avail?"

"He may be alive, so, why should I give up the hunt?"

Sharp's face grew dark.

"No, I won't take the diamonds and lose my father!" cried the Jersey boy.

"Then, that ends the business!" growled the villain.

CHAPTER X.

TATSY HOLCOMB.

"Yes, sir, that ends the business," repeated Simon Sharp, after a brief pause, and quietly rising, he crossed the room with the air of a resolute person.

Jerry looked after him but said nothing. If the rascal expected the boy to retract his words he was destined to disappointment and when he

reached the door he looked over his shoulder at Jerry.

Instead of replying to the look, which he understood very well, the boy glanced toward the window and left the man to himself.

Presently Jerry heard the door open and when he looked again Simon Sharp had quietly stepped out, leaving him alone once more, and of course still a prisoner.

"I am now on the right trail and no mistake!" concluded Jerry. "I have seen Simon Sharp remove his mask and know him for one of the biggest rascals in New York."

He found that in going away the scamp had taken along the envelopes which had been addressed, as well as the pen and ink, leaving him in fact nothing at all with which he might communicate with the outside world.

"If I can't get away from here without help I must find some way to let Fred know where I am," continued the young Jerseyite. "Simon Sharp is liable to come back at any time, or he may give me wide berth for some hours while he spins a web in another quarter. At any rate, I must go to work and not let grass grow under my feet."

He waited more than half an hour, or, until he thought Simon Sharp had quitted the building and then he tried to open the shutter which had been shut previous to his arrival; but he found this to be a great task and one beyond his strength.

He was working at the window when he caught the sound of some one in the hall and he instantly desisted. Had Simon come back already?

As Jerry turned from the window to listen near the door, he heard a voice and the sound sent a thrill to his brain.

"He's a boy, for I saw Sharp bring him up here," said the voice, which sounded like a woman's. "He knows I don't like a hair on his head, and if he's got the boy here ag'in' his will, why, I'd just like to beat him."

Jerry was at the door in an instant.

"The door is locked," said another voice which might belong to a younger person.

The next moment there was the sound of keys and Jerry heard one move in the lock.

"My name isn't Polly Ping if I don't want to get a head of Simon Sharp," accompanied the turning of the key. "It fits the lock pretty well and—Ha! now I have it."

In an instant the door was pushed open and Jerry had to fall back quite suddenly to prevent being upset.

"Hey, boy?" cried a voice.

"Here I am," answered Jerry, presenting himself to two astonished women of middle age.

"Look! I told you he had a boy cooped up in here," exclaimed one of the pair, turning triumphantly to her companion. "You didn't come here because you really wanted to, did you, boy?"

"I did not."

"And you want out, eh?"

"That I do very bad!"

"Well, I'm Polly Ping, and I don't like one hair that grows on Simon Sharp's head. On the other hand, I'd like to pull 'em out, every one o' them. Come along if you want out of this trap, for that's just what it is. Where's your baggage?"

"I've got none," said Jerry, only too eager to quit the spot.

In a little time he found himself on the outside of Mr. Sharp's door and the women conducted him into another part of the house where he was entertained by the unknown woman, while Polly Ping went below to see if the coast was clear.

Pretty soon Polly came back with a smile on her homely face, and announced that Simon Sharp was not to be seen; then Jerry, after thanking his deliverers from the bottom of his heart for their services, went down the steps and bounded out into the street.

"Now look out, Mr. Simon Sharp!" cried he. "I guess we understand each other now. You unmasked yourself a little too soon. Photograph Fred will open his eyes at my narrative, and I won't keep away from him any longer than I can help."

Jerry remembered the number of Photograph Fred's abode and hastened in that direction. Once he stopped suddenly and felt his heart leap into his mouth, for there suddenly crossed his path the tall figure of a man who startled him. He was accompanied by a duds individual much younger in looks, and Jerry thought that Jasper Paget had picked up a new acquaintance.

But, fortunately, Mr. Paget did not see the boy, who let the pair go on while he continued the journey to Fred's home.

He found Mrs. Paster sitting up for Fred, and when she saw Jerry her first inquiry was about her boy.

"He went out like a cat," explained the mother. "I suppose an idea struck him and off he went without saying when he would turn up again. He was looking for you, but now you've found yourself and he should come back once more."

Jerry told Mrs. Paster all about his adventures, and the two waited in vain for Fred, with the clock on the wall ticking off the minutes, which seemed to resolve themselves into hours of uncertainty.

Jerry fell asleep in the chair at last, he had not had much sleep of late; and leaving him there, the widow stole from the room and went down upon the street.

After awhile the Jersey boy awoke with a start and had Mrs. Paster's hand on his arm in an anxious grip. There was fear on her face.

"It's morning and he's not back!" cried the young detective's mother.

Jerry jumped from the chair with a cry.

"Why did you let me sleep so long?" he exclaimed. "I might have been looking for Fred."

"But you looked so tired and slept so well where you were that I hadn't the heart to disturb you," was the reply. "The night is gone and no Fred."

"Do you think he has fallen into a trap of any kind?"

"I hope not, but from what you have told me about Simon Sharp, he is a real spider, ready to suck the blood of any victim. And of course, the man called Jasper Paget is no better. Fred should have been here before this, and his absence means something."

"What are we to do?—warn the police?"

"That looks like the best thing to do, but it would almost force us to tell the secret of your hunt which Fred does not want disclosed. Let us hunt for him ourselves awhile. We'll go down and see Melly."

The Jersey boy acceded to this proposition, and a minute afterward he and Mrs. Paster were on the street. Melly Noonan was found at home and her cheek blanched when she heard that a night had passed without bringing Photograph Fred home. She had not seen him since the previous day, and when Jerry's story had been told, she shared the fears of the anxious mother.

Melly was talking, when a rap sounded on her door, and, on opening it, she was handed a card by a little girl whose appearance was unkempt and "streety."

"Please, miss, the young gentleman sent it up," said the child, as Melly took the card.

The newsgirl took the card and colored indignantly.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Waitin' for an answer below," was the reply.

"You see how I am! annoyed," remarked Melly, coming back to her visitors. "Here is a card sent up by a young dude who has been hovering about my stand for several weeks. He buys papers which he never reads, just to get a smile from me, and now he has the impudence to send up his card this early in the morning. I want you to get a look at him, Mr. Jerry. Go down-stairs and come back soon; but, don't forget to photograph Mr. Holcomb on your mind."

Jerry went to the door, saying that he would like to see Melly's duds admirer, but no sooner had he stepped into the hall and glanced down the steps than he drew back and sprung into the room.

"Why, that's the man I saw with Jasper Paget last night!" he exclaimed. "They were talking in whispers on the street, and I have no doubt are hand in glove in some scheme."

Melly was surprised.

"We know that Jasper Paget and Simon Sharp are playing the same game," said she, "and Tatsy Holcomb may know some of their secrets. I'll have him come up. Just step into my bedroom and come out when I give the signal."

In a moment Jerry Jump and Fred's mother were tenants of Melly's sleeping apartment, while Melly told the little card-bearer who still waited, to tell the gentleman below to come up immediately.

Pretty soon there were steps in the hallway at the head of the flight and Melly, hardly able to keep from laughing—saw Tatsy Holcomb bowing and scraping before her. The young chap was delighted, and when he had expressed his pleasure several times, Melly led the conversation into a very important channel:

"You know a gentleman named Paget, do you not, Mr. Holcomb?" the newsgirl asked.

"Um—I—really, Miss Melly—"

"I've seen you with him," broke in the girl. "I suppose you met him accidentally."

"Quite so, I assure you. Do you know him?"

"Only by sight, and I have no desire to get acquainted with him. I am interested in a friend who may have fallen into a web which Mr. Paget knows something about, and the person who can give me any information about my friend—my cousin to tell the truth—will earn my lasting gratitude."

The keen eyes of the newsgirl saw Tatsy Holcomb start at these words. He moved uneasily in his chair, crossed his legs and uncrossed them again.

"Do you mean that, really, Miss Melly?" he asked.

"Indeed I do," was the answer.

"I'll do what I can for you," said the dude. "I don't know much about the webs of the city, but I've been around, and—really I—I—say Miss Melly, would you let me call if I should find your cousin?"

The newsgirl smiled her sweetest.

"I feel that I could not object," was the reply.

Five minutes later Jerry Jump and Mrs. Paster stepped from the little room and Melly sprung toward them with a joyful cry.

"Follow Tatsy Holcomb; quick!" she cried to Jerry. "He knows where Fred is."

The Jersey boy was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

BACK IN THE WEB.

TATSY HOLCOMB had some good traits and lots of ambition.

He was anxious to shine as the accepted admirer of Melly, the newsgirl, and was willing to do almost anything that would secure the favor of her smiles. Therefore, when he left her house he had made up his mind to set Photograph Fred free from the web into which he had precipitated himself.

We need not stop here to mention how Mr. Holcomb came to fall in with "Baldy" Paget, the schemer and companion of Simon Sharp. The two had been friends for some time, though the young dude had never assisted Paget in anything really bad. He had agreed to meet "Baldy" at the house where Phil was caught, and there the sharper had proposed a plan to Tatsy which involved getting even with Old Hawkbill for the treatment received at his hands.

This was the real matter under discussion when Fred stole into the house and was captured, and how Tatsy had resolved to rescue the Camera Sharp as a passport to Melly's love.

Followed by Jerry, the dude pushed down the street until he reached a certain corner, where he boarded a passing car and continued his journey. The Jersey boy was not long following his example, and in a short time he was ensconced in the same car, looking as independent as he could.

The car was not very full when Jerry boarded it, but by and by it filled up, and he was squeezed into one corner by a large woman, who appeared to take great delight in rendering him uncomfortable.

All at once Tatsy rose and went toward the door. Jerry, who had been watching him like a hawk, attempted to follow, but found that he could not extricate himself from his corner.

He saw Tatsy leave the car, and by a prodigious effort he freed himself and reached the door. He was getting off when he felt a hand at his collar, and looking round, found himself face to face with Simon Sharp!

It seemed to Jerry that his blood would freeze in his veins. He had just escaped from the spider's trap, and here he was in the grasp of the same bloodsucker.

"Don't be in a hurry, young man; I'm going to get off here," said Simon, with a grin, which Jerry rightly took for a grin of triumph, and suiting action to words, the city sharp alighted, still holding to the Jersey boy's coat, and the two stood on the street together.

"You didn't want to stay at my house, eh?" laughed Simon.

"You know I did not after what passed between us," was the answer. "I hadn't anything to keep me where I was, and everything to take me away."

Jerry, while he spoke, was looking after Tatsy still in sight, though he would disappear in a moment, and he did not want to lose him.

"Let's go elsewhere and discuss this business," continued Simon Sharp.

Jerry pulled back with a good deal of force, but the sharp did not relinquish his hold.

"Don't be stubborn," said Simon.

"And don't you carry your game too far," was the quick retort.

"Ha! I'd like to see you do anything. I know more than you think I do, but we needn't discuss that here. The more you kick against us the worse it will be for your cause."

Jerry Jump looked straight into the eyes of the villain.

"I understand you thoroughly," said he. "You would say that the more I disobey you, the worse it will be for my father. You need not conceal your real words, Simon Sharp, Sharp by name and sharp by nature. You will unhand me right away, or I shall call the police and see what right you have to hold me in the streets of New York."

If Jerry thought that these words would secure his immediate freedom he was mistaken. On the

contrary, Simon Sharp looked down into his face and laughed.

"Call 'em if you want to," he said. "I guess the cops and I would get along very well together. There's one now."

Jerry had already caught sight of the burly policeman on the pave, and taking Simon at his word, he hallooed at him, attracting his attention, and the next minute he was being escorted toward the sidewalk by the scamp.

"Here's a boy what has a notion that he wants you," remarked Simon to the policeman.

The effrontery of the sharp was amazing.

The big guardian of the city straightened and looked down upon Jerry as though he intended to club him at once, but he seemed to change his mind for he asked him what he wanted.

"I want to be loosed from this man," said the boy. "He has no right to hold me."

"No right? By Jove, that's pretty cool," laughed Simon Sharp. "I reckon a boy's guardian has a right to take care of him when he catches him running off?"

"Of course he has," responded the officer.

"But he's no more my guardian than you are," persisted Jerry. "This is Simon Sharp, a man who is against me, and one who knows what became of our diamonds, if he don't know where—"

"Are you paid to listen to the story of a runaway?" broke in the New York sharp.

"No, I'm not; take him home if there's where you think he ought to go," and to Jerry's chagrin the policeman turned away and left him in the grip of the biggest rascal in Gotham.

The Jersey boy could see by the eyes that looked down upon him that Simon had scored another victory; besides this, he had lost Tatsy Holcomb, and consequently the clew to Fred's prison. His blood boiled within him, and when Simon Sharp started off with his hand at his wrist, Jerry pulled back and cried lustily for help.

The spectacle of a boy struggling in the grip of a man on the street, was one not very common in that quarter, and the pedestrians stopped to look at it for a moment.

The policeman who had gone a few steps glanced back and smiled.

"Help, help!" cried Jerry. "This man is Simon Sharp, thief, blackleg and burglar!"

"Oh, I'm anything but a nice man just now," replied the fellow. "I am your legal guardian and you know it. I guess I have a right to overhaul a runaway boy on the street and take him home where he belongs."

Simon with a brazenness which became him so well appealed to the gathering crowd as he spoke, and Jerry, who looked in the same direction, saw that the people had very little sympathy for him. They were with Simon who, well dressed, did not look like a scoundrel.

"Come along and do not obstruct the walk," said the spider, and despite his strength Jerry was dragged off and whisked round the nearest corner.

The reader may imagine the boy's thoughts when he found himself once more in the grip of Simon Sharp. His heart for a moment sunk within him and he was on the eve of giving up the battle.

"I nabbed you just in time," smiled Simon.

"Who let you out?"

Jerry made no reply. He was resolved not to betray the woman who had freed him from the nest, and when Simon drew this much from his silence, he laughed that it wouldn't remain a secret very long.

"This is what I call luck," continued Simon. "I got a glimpse of you from the sidewalk and in a jiffy I was on the rear platform of the car waiting for you to get off. Didn't that old woman nearly crush you in the corner?"

The boy from Jersey was in no humor for joking.

"I shall escape again," he suddenly exclaimed, looking up into the rascal's face. "All the bolts and bars you have, sha'n't keep me in your clutches. I am going to get out and expose you. It is war between us to the end, Simon Sharp. You know all about the diamonds and my father, and I am determined that the secret shall be found out and the guilty made to pay for their deeds."

"That's a nice prospect ahead," grinned Simon. "You're not very complimentary when it comes to praising me. Where were you going on that car?"

"That is my business," answered Jerry.

"You seemed to want to get off after the dude. Do you know Mr. Holcomb?"

"Do you?" retorted Jerry.

"I've seen him, but I don't keep company with dudes."

"Your partner does, though."

"My partner?"

"Yes, Jasper Paget."

Simon Sharp started slightly at mention of the name.

"I know now; you were following Tatsy Holcomb. You were playing spy for a purpose. What's become of your pard, the boy who carries the "detective" under his coat?"

"Tatsy Holcomb knows."

"He does, eh? And you were after him to find out? Well, it looks to me as if your friend with the camera was in trouble. I think I shall look into this myself."

Simon Sharp said no more for some time and he and Jerry walked along in silence. The hand of the sharp still gripped Jerry's wrist and the boy made no more appeals for release. It seemed to him that the world was against him.

It was a long walk to Simon's quarters, but at last they ascended the stairs they had ascended before together, and when he was pushed into the

room with which he was somewhat acquainted, Jerry's heart sunk within him.

"We'll come to terms before you get out," said Simon, looking coldly at him. "I do know something, but you are not cute enough to pick me up. Your photograph friend has some shrewdness but he's not sharp enough to get ahead of me, Simon Sharp, from Sharperville. So Tatsy knows where your pal is, does he? Well, I'll look into this."

The next moment the door shut on the figure of the New York sharp, and Jerry, completely overcome, was again the sole occupant of the room from which he had already escaped.

He sat still for a time when he sprung up and bounded to the door. He seized the knob and turned it violently but it would not open.

"Merciful Father! is a rascal like Simon Sharp to triumph?" he exclaimed. "Am I to fail in my hunt for the lost parent? No, no, it cannot be. I must get out of this den. I must gladden mother's heart with a happy solution of the mystery. These infernal scoundrels shall be unmasked and brought to justice! I devote my life to this task."

CHAPTER XII.

A SINGULAR COMPACT.

MR. TATSY HOLCOMB was as good as his word, for he went straight to the house where he had left Photograph Fred bound and gagged in the dark room. The young dude did not possess a key to the house, so he had to approach it from the rear at the sacrifice of a pair of stylish pantaloons which were ripped while climbing the fence; but he kept on and entered the place through the basement.

He did not stop to think that he might incur the hostility of "Baldy" Paget, but ascended the stairs and reached the door of the room where Fred had been left.

Tatsy found the door locked, but he forced the lock with a piece of iron which he found in another room, and appeared suddenly to the Camera Sharp who was still helpless in the chair.

When Tatsy let some light into the room the boy was astonished. The dude was the last person looked for.

"Your Cousin Melly—mighty fine girl, too—wants to know what's become of you," said Mr. Holcomb, as he removed Fred's gag. "I thought I would please her by releasing you. I never did go in for treating you in this manner; now, there you are—free, and by the hand of Tatsy Holcomb!"

The cords had been severed by the dude's knife and Photograph Fred stood up and stretched himself after his long confinement.

"I'll remember this, Mr. Holcomb," said he.

"Oh, don't mind it. All I ask is that you say a good word for me to your Cousin Melly—audacious fine creature, that—and that'll make us square."

Fred promised that he would gladly do this for the services just rendered; but the next moment he made Tatsy Holcomb start.

"What's between you and that prison bird, 'Baldy' Paget?" he asked.

"Is he really that?" queried the young dude.

"Of course he is, and nothing else. He's bound to see the inside of a cell before he's much older and if you stick to him you're bound to go with him. What were you two talking about when I was caught in this house?"

Tatsy seemed to hesitate.

"It's all right, if you don't want to tell," continued Fred. "I am going to wage war against Mr. Paget and Simon Sharp and not stop till they've disgorged and restored the man they've stolen."

"The man they've stolen?" echoed the dude. "Heavens! have they done such a thing?"

"Yes, and, what is more, you've made yourself an accomplice."

The dude got white and shook with fear.

"By Jove, I didn't think I was getting into a pickle of this kind, really I didn't," he exclaimed.

"But you're there all the same," was the reply.

"You see, that the law wouldn't let up on you if you came before the court with a plea of ignorance. You're in very bad company, Mr. Holcomb, and you don't expect Melly to think anything of a man who refuses to tell the truth in order to shield a rascal, do you?"

This was a proposition that fairly staggered Tatsy.

"If you don't want to tell me why, all right, as I've said," resumed Fred, in an indifferent manner. "I'm a little anxious to get out of this house. Don't tell if you would rather see wrong succeed."

Photograph Fred was walking toward the door when he heard the voice of his liberator and the next second there was a hand on his sleeve.

"I don't want wrong to succeed any more than you do," said the dude.

"You don't eh? Well, I confess that your silence don't confirm your words."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't like it."

"Of course he won't like exposure," smiled Fred. "You would incur the enmity of Mr. Paget if you tell the truth, but he can't hurt you if you keep out of his way till we get through with him."

"Will he be arrested?"

"It's very likely."

"When?"

"When we get positive evidence against him."

"Positive evidence of what?"

"Of conspiracy with Simon Sharp to rob the Jump family of the diamonds, and then to get Thomas Jump, the father, into their clutches for the purpose of further enriching them."

"How?" asked Tatsy Holcomb eagerly.

"Thomas is an inventor who can make almost anything. He has been drawn into the trap by the villains for the purpose of making models of his inventions. He is somewhere in this city. I am cer-

tain of this. Why, since I took this trail he has been carried from one house to another by Simon Sharp and that within the last few hours."

"What sort of things has Thomas Jump made?"
"I can't tell you much about them. For one thing he has made a wonderful clock from which a skeleton steps and at the right time blows a horn."
"Did he ever make a small brass model not much bigger than a walnut, a wee little piece of machinery which works like a charm?"
"I can't say; but what do you know about a thing of this kind?"

"I've seen it in 'Baldy' Paget's room."
"Was that what took him to Old Hawkbill's?"
"Not that particular model."
"But one took him there, then?" eagerly inquired Fred.

"Yes, and when you came to this house and got caught, we were talking about his trip to Old Hawkbill's. He wants to get even with the old man. He was robbed of his model by the old rascal and choked besides."

"Then, Paget knows where Thomas Holcomb is," said Fred.

Before the boys left the room they made it appear that Fred had freed himself. They cut the cords in several places as if the captive had finally reached his knife, and when they had done this they crept through the back way and went off.

"A good word for me to Melly," were Tasy Holcomb's parting words. "If I had a cousin like her I'd be in clover up to my ears all the time. I'll see you later, Mr. Paster. You know where to find me," and a moment afterward Fred, feeling as light as a feather once more, was walking down the street with his head in a sort of whirl.

Instead of proceeding home, he went to Old Hawkbill's shop and found the old fellow in.

Old Jacob started on seeing the Camera Sharp, but took him back to the little private room and carefully shut the door.

"You don't want to fall into the hands of the cops, do you, Jacob?" asked Fred, at which the old man turned pale and shook.

"What have I done to get there?" he nervously asked.

"They say that you robbed the man with whom you had the difficulty the other night."

"My God! what could I take from him?" cried Old Hawkbill.

"His model," answered Fred, looking at the person before him. "Mr. Paget came here with a model but did not go away with it. He was robbed in this shop. Was it in this room, Jacob?"

The old man seemed to stare at the boy as if he was looking through him at something beyond.

"You belong to the police, don't you?" he returned at last. "You help them whenever you can, and they pay you something for your work. I know you."

"Never mind what I do. Just now I know that 'Baldy' Paget was robbed, that he was robbed in this house, and he says—"

"That I did it?" broke in Jacob.

"Certainly. I want to see that model."

Old Hawkbill almost sprang from his chair. The next moment he was leaning forward with eyes that seemed to start from his head, and Fred saw that the ends of his fingers were buried in his yellowish palms.

"I haven't got it," he said. "He lies if he says I have."

"But you don't deny that you took it, do you?"

"I haven't got it—that's what I say," was the answer.

"A pretty slick reply, Jacob," smiled Fred. "You've simply put it out of your hands till the clouds pass by. I understand these things. They're old, Jacob."

"But I've been robbed," cried the old man. "That safe was broken open and it was taken. I'll swear to this."

Photograph Fred fell back in his chair and looked at the genius of the evil shop.

"What would a common burglar want with a model which he knew nothing about?" he asked quietly and in a way which told Old Hawkbill that his assertions were not more than half-believed.

"If a common burglar took it it must have been through mistake," said Jacob. "You see it was heavy like, and so wrapped that it would lead a fool to think it was coin. That's the way I think about it. When the thief discovered what he had he dropped it somewhere, or sold it in another shop for a song. I swear that this is true, boy. I have been robbed. It would have been all the same if I had given 'Baldy' Paget his outrageous price for the little thing. Now, what are you going to do? tell the police what I've told you?"

"I don't have to, Jacob," answered Fred. "You are mistaken when you think that I run to them with every thing I hear. I am working up a case on my own hook just now, and if successful, 'Baldy' Paget will never get even with you for that choking and his night in your cellar."

This seemed to please the old man.

"Do you know who makes the models by which Mr. Paget and his pard get rich?" suddenly asked Old Hawkbill.

"I do, but just now he's lost to me."

"And you want to find him, eh?"

"Yes, that is what will baffle the two scamps and keep them from doing you any injury."

A sudden idea seemed to strike the old man for his eyes got a quick glitter.

"See here!" he cried. "Let's go snooks, eh? The man who stole that model from this safe hasn't thrown it away, for then it would fall into the hands of the police. He's put it up somewhere. I know all the shops in New York, and they include a good

many you know nothing about. I want to look at the model again. It would help to convict 'Baldy' Paget of robbery and eventually lead to the finding of the man who made it. Shall we be pards, boy?"

"In this, yes, Jacob," replied Photograph Fred, and stretching his hand across the table he sealed the strange compact with the wary old rascal, and a few moments later walked from the close precincts of the den feeling that he had made good time since his rescue by Tasy Holcomb.

Having nothing pressing on his hands just then, the young detective went homeward, watched, though he knew it not, by a pair of sharp eyes which happened to pick him up on the street. They followed him to the very stairs which he climbed, to burst in upon his mother who sent up a shout of joy at sight of him, and while he listened to what had transpired since his departure, the owner of the eyes was on the street below waiting for him to reappear.

When Fred obliged the man by coming forth with a look of anxiety on his bright countenance, he was instantly spotted, and when he had started off he had the fellow at his heels. If he had looked back he might have seen the shadow, for he was too big to be overlooked.

Simon Sharp from Sharperville was on the boy detective's trail, and when Fred joined Melly at her news-stand, the city wolf fell back and watched the two with evil on his face.

"Something's up," said he to himself. "I wonder if the boy knows that I've got the Jersey fly in the web once more? Something's got to be done, or that young sharp may play the deuce with this little game of ours. Something shall be done," and when Fred bade Melly good-by, Simon Sharp followed him again.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT.

THE aim of the Camera Detective now was to find a clew to Jerry's whereabouts. He was almost certain that the boy had fallen back into the cunning web woven by either Simon Sharp or his comrade, Jasper Paget. He no longer doubted the identity of the man who made the models mentioned by Old Hawkbill and, confident that the old man would keep his part of the compact, he was left to work another field.

If he had suspected that Simon Sharp was watching him he would have proceeded with more caution, but he was destined to make an astounding discovery before he had gone very far.

Fred was moving along with the crowd which was hardly fast enough for him when there turned the corner right ahead a man whose appearance instantly attracted him.

It was "Baldy" Paget. The fellow was in a hurry, and as he came toward the young detective, he wondered if they would collide. But fortunately Mr. Paget who was not on the lookout for escaped prisoners just then, passed Fred, and when the boy turned his head to look after him, he saw him stop and talk to a man on the sidewalk.

"What, Simon Sharp?" cried Photograph Fred. "Have I had the rascal on my trail all this time?" and he slipped into a store that instant, much to Simon's chagrin by the language he used in "Baldy's" presence.

"You've made me miss the young scamp," growled the sharp from Sharperville.

"Which one—Photograph Fred?"

"Of course."

"I guess you're off your base there. I've got the boy caged myself and was just going to tell you all about it."

Simon laughed derisively.

"Your trap, whatever it is, holds nobody very long, for the young face-catcher has just passed. Why, you must have brushed him yourself just before you met me."

Mr. "Baldy" Paget looked dumfounded.

"If that is so, where were my eyes?" he exclaimed.

"Not in your head, that's certain," was the reply. "Don't you look for a breeze if your prisoner is at large?"

The face of the listener showed that he did. He was uneasy. If Fred had escaped, he might expect trouble, for would not the boy inform the police at once, and he be picked up at any time on the street, and the whole game collapse?

Paget left Simon as soon as possible and went by a roundabout way to the house where he had captured Fred in the act of listening to the confab between him and Tasy Holcomb. He wanted to see for himself, and entered the building with his heart in his throat.

It did not take him long to reach the chamber in which he had left Fred, and in a twinkling he was staring at the pieces of cord on the floor, and the truth of Simon's assertion burst upon him. Yes, the Camera Sharp had escaped.

"Why didn't I search him?" cried "Baldy," gazing at the bits of cord. "He's slicker than a weasel and I might have known that he had a knife which he would use to advantage as soon as he could free his hand. The next time I'll play a different game; but maybe there'll be no 'next time.' I don't think Tasy has been here since we went away. If he has and seen this, he's out of the city ere this, for he's easily scared, and won't go into the scheme to get even with old Hawkbill."

It was a good thing for the young dude that he was not suspected of treachery, for Jasper Paget was a bad man to betray, as he would have found out, and when Jasper quitted the house he took with him the cut cord and removed all evidences of Fred's captivity.

"I'll go and look at him again and see what he's

working at now," said he, when he gained the street. "I made a failure with my scheme to sell one of his models to old Jacob for a cool thousand, and now I must wait till he gets up another in which I think there's a fortune."

Half an hour later Paget knocked at the door of Sarah Sackett's house and was admitted. The widow, who had been the model-maker's keeper so long, looked strangely at him, but said nothing while he went toward the little workshop which she had shown to Photograph Fred.

"Heavens, what does this mean?" cried "Baldy" Paget, staggering back from the door and staring at the empty room. "Where is he?"

"You mustn't ask me," was the reply, and Mrs. Sackett smiled.

"Who took him off?" asked Paget. "He hasn't been gone long. Did the boys—"

"He was not taken off by boys," interrupted the woman. "I thought you would know all about it since you came here often and spent some time watching him."

"But I didn't know anything of this. He didn't escape, did he?"

"I should think not," the woman smiled again, noticing the palor which accompanied the last question.

A sudden light seemed to dawn upon Paget.

"Did he go off with Simon?"

"He went away with Simon."

"When?"

The widow told him.

She saw his lips move suddenly and not in the best of humor. It was evident that he thought Simon Sharp guilty of treachery, that he was trying to work a game of his own, and he kept silent for several minutes.

"I suppose you haven't the slightest idea where Simon took our friend?" said Jasper. "Of course he wouldn't tell you anything about it!"

"I didn't seek to know," quietly replied the woman.

Jasper Paget did not remain long after this discovery. It seemed to crush him, and he did not breathe free until he was some distance from the house.

"I'd like to see him play a game within a game," said he and he spoke with his teeth shut. "I saw him awhile ago and he said nothing about this move. If it is square business, why didn't he mention it? I won't stand any shenanigan, Simon. By Jupiter! there'll be two of us if this is the way you're going to play for the products of that man's brain."

The more Jasper thought of the removal of the model-maker from Sarah Sackett's house the angrier he became.

"Simon took the lion's share from the very start," he growled. "None but the biggest diamonds would do for him, and I had to take the smallest, though I risked my head getting them. And when it came to decoying the fly from Jersey I had to do all the work while he sat back and took in the profits. Then, when the models were to be transferred to this city, I had to go across the river and get 'em. And now what does he do? He goes to where the prisoner was and coolly takes him off, without letting me know a word about it. I never saw such cool impudence. Simon Sharp, you can go too far with 'Baldy' Paget. There can be a dissolution of partnership, and that on very short notice. Confound you, I'll ask for an explanation when we meet."

Just an hour after coming to this conclusion, Jasper Paget dropped into a place on the Bowery and walking back came suddenly upon a man who had just taken a seat at a round table.

The man whom he had encountered was Simon Sharp, and the cunning scamp seemed to notice fire in Jasper's eyes and sniff a scene in advance.

The two men sat eying each other across the table for some time, when all at once the hand of Paget came over the rim and rested on the greasy board.

"So you took him off," said Jasper, looking straight into Simon's face. "Was there danger ahead?"

Cool Simon Sharp from Sharperville was not the least disconcerted by the sudden attack.

"When did you discover it?" he coolly asked.

"Just now. You had a chance to tell me, but kept your mouth shut, as though it were none of my business. Ain't I interested in this game?"

"I suppose you are. Yes, he was removed for safety. We're watched."

"By two boys?"

"By dangerous eyes, no difference whose they are," was the answer. "I thought it best to take him off; Mrs. Sackett's house was a little too public, you see."

"But he got along well enough there all the same. Where is he now?"

Simon Sharp seemed to draw within himself like a turtle. In an instant he became a sphinx.

"You don't want to tell me, I see," said Paget.

"Does he belong to you?"

"Didn't I just say that we're watched?"

Jasper colored. He leaned across the table, wet with the leavings of beer, and eyed Sam like a tiger.

"You want to break with me, I notice. You think I can be thrown off at pleasure and turned away."

You want not only the lion's share, which you've taken from the first, but you want all. You want to take the inventions as they fall finished from his brain and reap all the golden profits. I've risked my head more than once in this big scheme of ours. When I went down to Jersey and scooped in the models I came near being shot by an old farmer who was watching his own hen-roost. And what did I get for it all? Three small diamonds which disappeared long ago."

"What did you do with the last model?" came across the table.

"What model?"

"Why, the one we set such a store on. You know what became of it, and you sit there and tell me that you got nothing but three little diamonds. What did you get for the bit of machinery, Baldy?"

Jasper, red in the face a moment before, was now white. His lips quivered, and if he had spoken on the spur of the moment he would have stuttered.

"Look here," said he, when he had taken breath. "The model don't begin to set off what you have taken for your share."

"Ha, you took it, then? I thought so!"

"Yes, I took it," cried Paget. "I had to do something to catch up with you. And now you've hidden him in order to rake in all the profits."

Simon Sharp fell back in his chair and gazed coolly at his partner.

"Don't you intend to tell me where he is?" asked Paget.

"Wait awhile. We're watched, I say."

"Do you think I would go and give away his hiding place to the police?" broke in Jasper. "You want to have all the money, but by heavens, you shall not! I'll have my share or none at all. Three small diamonds and a model which I lost! Think of it."

"That model was a fortune," quietly remarked Simon.

"Never mind it now; it's gone. You won't share the new secret with me, eh? All right."

"Baldy" Paget sprang up and pushed back his chair.

"What are you going to do?" asked Simon.

"I'll see you later," was the answer, and the next moment Simon Sharp was alone, his companion having rushed from the place.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CAGED BIRD.

EAGER to find a clue to his young friend Jerry, Photograph Phil was constantly on the alert.

He was confident that the Jersey boy had fallen back into the clutches of Simon Sharp, and thought that by discovering that worthy's nest he would find out something concerning Jerry.

At the same time he was anxious to know the new hiding place of the model-maker, who could not be any other person than Thomas Jump. He knew that he had been taken from Sarah Sackett's house by Simon Sharp, but what had become of him? This was a puzzle.

The young detective was on the Bowery the night after his escape from Jasper Paget's web, thanks to Tetsy Holcomb, whom he had not seen since their separation on the street, and had his eyes open for his quarry.

He intended to watch the Bowery awhile, in hopes that Simon Sharp would show up, or that Mr. Paget would walk into view and give him something to do.

Eagerly did he scrutinize every face that came in sight, but the ones he wanted to see did not gratify him.

Photograph Fred had taken a position where he was sure he would see everybody out under the Bowery lamps, and at the same time be hidden himself from public gaze.

He had been there some time when he accidentally discovered that he was being rather closely watched by a woman, who seemed afraid to approach him.

The longer Fred covertly regarded the woman the more he became convinced that this was the case, and having made up his mind to this effect, he went toward her and surprised her by his presence.

"Are you Photograph Fred?" asked the woman, when she found herself confronted by the Camera Sharp.

"That's what I'm called sometimes."

"I thought so, but I wasn't sure," she replied. "It wouldn't do for me to make a mistake, and if you're Photograph Fred, you're the very person I've been looking for. But don't let us converse here. I'm out on important business, and it won't do to be picked up together."

Fred conducted the woman, who was about forty, with a thin face, which at one time must have been good looking, to a spot where they could converse without much danger of being seen, and turning upon her, suddenly demanded that she state her errand without delay.

"I am Polly Ping," she said. "You've never seen me before, but that don't matter. I'm interested in a friend of yours. I helped him out of a trap once before, but he's in again, and this time is pretty well secured, I fancy."

"You mean Jerry, don't you?" eagerly inquired Fred.

"Yes, he's told me his name, and that is it. In order to convince you that I'm all O. K., you will look at this from the boy himself."

Polly Ping produced a bit of folded paper, which the young detective quickly seized and opened. Bending toward the light, he read as follows:

"DEAR FRED: I am back in Simon Sharp's trap. I was out for a time, as you may have discovered, but here I am once more, tighter than before. The woman who released me the other time finds that she cannot repeat the trick without outside help. I have a good deal of news for you, for I have figured out Simon Sharp to a demonstration. The bearer of this note, which I hand to her by means of the crack under the door, will tell you where I am and give you all the assistance in her power. You can trust her in everything for she doesn't like a hair that grows on Simon Sharp's head. Come to my rescue as quickly as you can, for we have no time to lose. Meantime, keep one eye open for the rascals themselves."

JERRY."

Photograph Fred read the note the second time before he looked up into the waiting face of Mrs. Ping.

"You don't like Simon Sharp?" he said.

"Like him? I should say I don't! The rascal deserves a life term behind the bars of Sing Sing, and I'd like to help him thither, if possible."

"Well, you're doing your share of the good work," smiled the detective. "Please to tell me what you know about Jerry's situation."

This the woman was eager to do, and the Camera Sharp listened to the details as they fell from her tongue. She gave Fred an exact description of the house in which the Jersey boy was a prisoner, and said that if Simon had not secured the door with a lock which she knew nothing about, she would not be telling him about the matter, for she would have rescued Jerry herself.

"I live in the house with a sister of mine," continued Polly Ping. "We have long known that Simon and his partner were crooked. They go out sometimes and come back flush; then the money flies."

"Don't they ever quarrel?"

"Bless you, yes; but it never means anything much. We've heard them accuse each other of nearly every crime on the books, and once Simon's partner threatened to hand him over to the police."

"What did Simon say to that?"

"Oh, he just laughed and told him to go ahead. Of course the partner did nothing of the kind, and the next day they were as good friends as ever."

When the interview had come to a close, Photograph Fred and Mrs. Ping went out upon the street, the woman having previously given him the number of the house, and a few moments later they had separated.

The young shadow was confident that he had found a true clue to the whereabouts of the Jersey boy, and he resolved to rescue him at once.

He watched Polly Ping out of sight, and then walked slowly up the Bowery.

When he came to a certain door which was shut, he turned the knob and went in.

"Goodness, how you frightened me!" exclaimed a voice, as the figure of Old Hawkbill emerged from the shadows of the place.

Fred followed the old fellow back to his little private room.

"What have you done since I saw you?" he asked.

"I've picked up something. The stolen model was put up by the thief, just as I thought it would be."

"Pawnd, eh?" cried the young sharp. "That's a good thing. Did you get to see it?"

"Of course I did," grinned old Jacob. "That's what I went out for."

"It is the same one you lost?"

"The same one. The fellow who put it up was a well-known burglar. I have dealt with him. He did not know what he had till he got out of my place. The model is safe where he left it, for he will never redeem it. It will convict 'Baldy' Paget, though if the matter gets into court I might not cut a very fine figure in the case, ha, ha!"

"Don't let that bother you, Jacob," replied the boy. "Keep an eye on the model, and don't let it get away from you."

"I'll watch it like a hawk," answered the old scamp, who saw a small bonanza in the business before him. "It won't get away; trust me for that, boy."

Fred sallied out again, and after a short run came near the number which Polly Ping had given him.

It thrilled him to know that he was close to Jerry Jump, the Jersey boy, who had been caught for the second time by Simon Sharp's trap. As he looked at the house, and especially at the window which he knew, from the woman's description, was in the boy prisoner's room, he was seized with a desire to rush up the steps, and at once begin the work of rescue, but good judgment held him back.

While he looked at the house, the figure of Polly Ping came out, and the dark eyes of the woman looked all around. Fred saw at once that she was on the alert, and was anxious to see some one—probably him—and he immediately went forward and presented himself.

"So you're here?" cried Polly, out of breath, for the boy had startled her. "You can't do anything now, for Simon Sharp is at home."

"Is he with Jerry?"

"Yes. He dropped in awhile ago."

"By himself?"

"By himself. He's in bad humor. Something has happened that he doesn't like."

"Can't I go in, anyhow—say, to your room?" pleaded Fred.

Polly Ping hesitated for a moment.

"You might do that," she said slowly. "We've got to be very cautious, for Simon Sharp knows that I don't like him. He more than suspects that I helped the boy out the other time, though he hasn't paid me a visit to say so."

Photograph Fred glided toward the house, and then slipped inside, followed by Mrs. Ping, who dodged in ahead of him, and led the way up-stairs.

"In there," said the woman, pointing to a door which was closed, and Fred felt his pulses tingle with eagerness.

They went on to Mrs. Ping's apartment, and the boy shadow took a chair. In a moment Polly's sister came in and reported that Simon Sharp was standing in the hall with fire in his eye.

"What if he should come in here?" cried Polly, getting pale.

The words were hardly out of the woman's mouth ere a step sounded on the ears of all, and the latch clicked.

In an instant Fred sprang behind a table which stood near the wall and dropped to the floor.

The two women had to face the man who made his appearance, and sure enough he had "fire in his eye."

"Look here, madam," he began, singling out Polly. "Can't you attend to your own affairs?"

Polly Ping's angular figure seemed to increase in stature, and she stepped forward, taking good care to keep between the table and Simon Sharp.

"What have I done?" she demanded.

"You meddled with my affairs."

"In what way?"

Polly wanted to get a confession out of Simon, and one which Photograph Fred could hear.

"I don't intend to particularize," was the adroit reply; "but you know what I mean."

"That I let the boy out, eh?" smiled the woman.

Simon colored.

"By the way, what right have you to keep him under lock and key?" she went on. "Who is that boy, Simon Sharp?"

"That, Mrs. Ping, is none of your business."

The boy sharp heard the two women laugh derisively in concert.

"Just as you say, Mr. Sharp," Polly said. "I don't like one hair on your head, and I never will."

"Don't carry your dislike any further. If the boy is let out again I'll turn on you like a lion, and you'll wish you had never seen Simon Sharp of Sharperville. Keep your hands off! I give you fair warning! I am dangerous!" and shaking his fist at the sisters, he turned and tramped out with rage written all over his red face.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

No sooner had Simon Sharp vanished than Photograph Fred made his appearance from his retreat, and said that he was ready to go to Jerry's rescue. It was agreed, however, to wait until the scamp had left the vicinity, and Polly's sister went below to see whether he had done this.

In a little time the woman came back and reported that nothing could be seen of Simon, and the rescuers sallied from the room and went to the door of Simon's apartments.

Of course they found it fastened, and when they knocked in a gentle manner to attract Jerry's attention, they could get no reply.

Photograph Fred placed his lips against the door and called his friend's name; but the only response he received was silence, as before.

"Something's wrong in there," remarked the Camera Sharp, falling back and looking at the speechless women.

Polly Ping struck the door with her bare knuckles, saying:

"That rascal is capable of doing anything. I should not be surprised if he's murdered the boy. If he hasn't, why don't Jerry answer u—?"

The boy-shadow stepped back and looked at the door, as if mentally calculating how much power would be required to force it open, for his blood was up, and he more than half believed that Jerry Jump was in a situation which needed a decisive change.

"Call in the police," suggested Polly Ping's sister.

"This is my case, not theirs," returned Fred. "I could have gone to them long ago but would not. No, I won't call them in now."

He went up to the door once more, but his raps elicited no response.

"Bring me a hatchet," he said, glancing over his shoulder.

"That looks like business," exclaimed Polly, darting off, and a moment later she came back with the hatchet.

"You'll get the credit for this work till he knows better," smiled the boy addressing Mrs. Ping.

"I'm willing to take it, so go ahead. I don't like a hair on Simon Sharp's skull and he knows it. Cut the door to pieces, only get at Jerry as soon as possible."

An instant later the hatchet was at work and the knob was attacked with such vehemence that it soon yielded and in a short time the door was at Fred's mercy. The two women watched the stairs that led down to the sidewalk in order to alarm the boy should either Simon Sharp or Jasper Paget make their appearance; but they did not come.

The broken door was pushed in when the hatchet had done its work, and Fred sprang into the room. He found it dark, but he drew a match across the nearest wall and turned on the gas.

"Merciful heavens!" cried Polly Ping. "I was afraid of it all the time."

Fred had already discovered the sight which had drawn this exclamation from the horrified woman, and in an instant he was bending over the white face of Jerry Jump as it was exposed by the light.

The Jersey boy sat in a chair near the table, with his head bent back against the top of the seat and a ghastly look on his face. His eyes were wild and starting, and his hands rested on the arms of the chair with ropes at the wrists, showing that he was bound in the chair beyond all possibility of freeing himself.

Simon Sharp was going to make sure of his prisoner this time.

"He isn't dead, thank heaven!" exclaimed Fred from the chair. "The scamp did not finish his job if he intended to put Jerry out of the way. There's life enough here to beat the gang yet."

It did not take Fred long to use his knife on the cords, and, assisted by the two women, he carried Jerry across the hall to Polly's bed, on which he deposited his burden, telling the sisters to bring him back to consciousness while he went back and took a look through the spider's web.

Fred found in one corner a trunk which was locked, but he pried it open with the hatchet. The

first thing he saw was a well-wrapped bundle which he pounced upon and found very heavy when he lifted it.

Tearing open the bundle at one corner, Fred Paster caught the gleam of something bright, like polished brass, and in an instant he had made a startling discovery. The bundle contained a little machine, every part of which was perfect and the most delicate workmanship!

"Here's a link," thought the young detective, "This is some more of poor Thomas Jump's work, and it still further establishes the identity of the man who was taken away from Sarah Sackett by Simon Sharp."

Down at the bottom of the trunk the boy found another package not quite so large as the first, and it contained another model of different construction, but finished in every part.

Now his eyes glistened while he looked at the evidences of the spider's guilt.

The trunk contained no diamonds, though Fred searched it thoroughly, and when he rose, he had a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Simon Sharp will discover his loss when he comes back, and the next thing he thinks of will be flight unless he can turn the tables on me," thought the Camera Sharp. "I will have to play a quick hand to get ahead of the pair, and if they catch me napping, I won't get to boast of the outcome of this case."

He carried into the room near by the two models he had taken from the sharper's trunk and found that the sisters had brought Jerry back to consciousness for the Jersey boy smiled at Fred and put out his hand.

"Do you know these, Jerry?" asked Fred, showing the models, at which Jerry looked a long time before he spoke.

"That I do," he said at last. "They were in the box in the out house when father went away. They were stolen since I left home as mother wrote me, you know. You found them in that room?"

"In Simon Sharp's trunk," answered Fred.

"The rascals stole them!" Jerry was handling one of the models. "I think there's been something added to this one within the last few days. Look how new some of the work looks. Here's a new wheel which I know wasn't attached to the model when I saw it last."

"What does it prove, Jerry?"

The face of the Jersey boy instantly brightened. "It proves that father is still among the living!" he exclaimed.

"But in the grip of the conspirators, eh?" said Fred.

"Yes, in their hands."

Then Photograph Fred told Jerry all about his discoveries, how he had nearly found the man who had made the skeleton-guarded clock which had frightened Johnny Miggs and how he had fallen into Jasper Paget's trap to be rescued by Tatsy Holcomb; in short, there was nothing that he omitted.

To all this Jerry listened like a person in a maze. His eyes would snap sometimes, or bulge out from wonder, and when Fred ended he seized his hand and thanked him for all he had done.

"We'll go back to the trail together now!" cried he. "We'll find father and send these two scoundrels to where they belong."

"It won't be child's play, Jerry," rejoined Fred, with a shake of the head.

"I know that from my own experience in the hands of Simon Sharp of Sharpville. When he coolly proclaimed himself my guardian and hoodwinked the policeman, I knew he was all he is said to be—the greatest rascal unhung. How's Melly?"

Photograph Fred almost laughed aloud at the abruptness of Jerry's question; but he managed to keep a straight face and tell him that the newsgirl was doing very well, and that she would be delighted to hear of his rescue.

A few minutes later the two boys went down the stair and slipped out into the street. Polly Ping and her sister said that they would manage to keep out of Simon Sharp's way, and, thus assured, the boys went off.

"We'll go to mother's first," remarked Fred. "From there we'll branch out and try to trip the conspirators. If Simon comes back soon he'll get the start of us, but this is an age of telegraphs, and very few rascals like him get away, though they give one a good deal of trouble for a time."

"But the fellow may turn his attention to father," said Jerry, quickly.

"He is the goose that keeps the golden eggs for the gang. They expect to patent his models and reap a fortune. They may have done so already; but there is one they haven't got to realize on—the one 'Baldy' Paget tried to sell to Old Hawkbill. We know where it is and in time it will come forth as a witness against the scoundrels."

The boys had reached a certain corner as Fred finished, and Jerry, seizing the young shadow's arm, directed his attention to a young man lighting a cigarette under a lamp on the opposite side of the street.

"That is Tatsy Holcomb," cried Fred, darting across the street. "I don't want to let him get away, for he may have news for us."

Jerry followed leisurely in the boy detective's wake and saw the dude start violently when Fred touched him.

"What do you know, Tatsy?" eagerly inquired Photograph Fred.

"Not very much. I've been keeping pretty dark since I rendered you that service for your cousin Melly's sake. I saw Mr. Paget just now and took a little jog at his heels."

"You tracked him, did you?"

"I wanted to see where he was going, you know."

"And you found out?"

"He went over into W—street and looked suspiciously at a certain house which I thought at one time he was going to enter; but he came away without doing so, though I'm nearly sure that he would like to have gone in."

"What was the number? Of course you noticed that, Tatsy?"

The dude smiled.

"I couldn't help seeing that for I was uncommonly curious. It was No. 666, not hard to recollect, you know."

"Three sixes; that's easy, Tatsy. Well, I'll see you later."

"My regards to Melly; boss girl, that," returned the dude, and Fred rejoined Jerry.

The Camera Sharp almost dragged the Jersey boy into the street designated by Tatsy Holcomb, telling him in hurried sentences what he had discovered, and in a few seconds they were in the neighborhood of No. 666.

"There it is!" whispered Fred. "It may amount to nothing but—"

He did not get to say another word for the door opened and to the surprise of the boys Simon Sharp came out and coolly lit a cigar on the stoop.

CHAPTER XVI.

COMING BACK TO LIFE.

THE presence of Simon Sharp on the step of the house to which Tatsy Holcomb had tracked Jasper Paget, was enough to rouse the suspicions of the two spotters. They were, in fact, ready to believe that something was wrong in the building, and when they recalled the removal of the model-maker from Sarah Sackett's abode they began to feel that they had located him.

For a few seconds Simon smoked on the steps, as if undecided just what to do, and when he moved off he was watched out of sight by Fred and Jerry.

"We must know what brings the rogue to this house," declared the Camera Sharp. "He took things so coolly on the step, that he seemed to be familiar with the premises. But, how to get beyond the door is the question."

"That house may not be kept by another Sarah Sackett," suggested Jerry.

"True, Jerry. The people with whom we have to deal now may be body and soul in the employ of the spiders, and, this being so, we may have trouble; but we must see beyond the door and get a look at the inmates of 666 as soon as possible."

Nearly opposite the suspected house was a small store kept by a man who did not impress the boys very favorably when they entered. He had a morose and sour look, and from the first regarded our young hunters with decided suspicion.

Photograph Fred who acted as spokesman pretended that they were on hunt of an empty house, that they had seen the advertisement of one on that very street, but he had forgotten the exact number, and did not have the paper with him.

"It seems to me, though, that it was near here," continued the boy shadow. "Could it have been 663?"

"I rather guess you're off there," replied the grocer. "The people over there don't want to go away."

"You're sure of that eh?"

"I ought to be," snarled the man. "See here, the next time you start out to look up a house be sure you're right before you budge. I guess you don't want a house very bad, do you?"

He looked Fred squarely in the eye as the question was spoken, but the young sharp did not quail.

"If we didn't we wouldn't be in this part of the city after dark. Come, Tom," with a look at Jerry, "we'll have to look elsewhere. Maybe we can hit the right trail before long."

The boys quitted the store followed by the keen eyes of its proprietor who even went to the sidewalk to see what became of them. They saw this movement of his and went on, turning the first corner, but there stopped for consultation.

"Does the shopkeeper stand in with Simon Sharp?" asked Jerry.

"It looks a little that way. I don't like him at all. He knows something about the inmates of No. 666 if he does not train with Simon."

"He seemed to suspicion us."

"I more than half believe he did. We must be very careful. I don't intend to quit this neighborhood till we know more about that house. I have a plan. It may not work, but it's worth a trial. It may give us a glimpse of the inhabitants of 666, and I'm going to work it for all there is in it."

When Fred had explained his scheme, the boys found a small stationery shop where Fred purchased an envelope and a sheet of paper: the former he directed, putting down the whole address, but blurring all with the blotter that it would have taken a Philadelphia lawyer to have deciphered it.

Thus armed for the venture, the boys went back and Jerry stopped a block from the suspected house while Fred went boldly on.

In a little while the Camera Sharp mounted the steps and jerked the bell. He heard the sounds in a hall beyond and waited for the answer. Seconds seemed hours to Photograph Fred when he heard footsteps in the corridor and the door was opened just an inch.

"What's up?" asked a voice, evidently a woman's.

"I've got a letter."

"Hand it here, then," was the reply, and a hand was thrust out for the message.

"I may not be at the right door," said Fred, doubtfully. "I want to be right, you know. It would ruin me to make a mistake."

"Then take your letter elsewhere."

"And fail to deliver it? That would never do."

By this time the door was open another inch and the boy saw a sharp, hatchet-like face and two keen eyes that seemed to look through him.

"My letter is for a gentleman named—Let me see."

Fred had the letter in his hand and was leaning toward the door under pretense of trying to read the superscription, but in reality, trying to get into the house.

"A gentleman, did you say?" exclaimed the woman. "There's no man about these premises."

"But isn't this No. 666?"

"That's the number exactly, but I tell you—"

"Maybe you don't want the letter. I find some people like you, now and then."

The matter was becoming desperate with the boy detective. He saw the very object of the stratagem slipping from his hands. It would never do to quit the field defeated.

The next moment he had pushed the door open and slid into the hall before he could be checked, and was pretending to make out the name on the envelope, with the woman staring at him for his audacity. It was make or break with Photograph Fred, now.

The very impudence shown by the young sharp seemed to mollify the woman.

She put out her hand for the letter, but Fred drew back, as she might tear it open and expose the whole trick.

"Couldn't you turn up the light a little more so that I could see what I'm doing? The address is somewhat blurred, as they often are, and, as I said awhile ago, I don't want to blunder."

"There!" cried the woman, turning on the gas till the whole hall was bathed in light. "Now do your errand and get out of here. I've told you that we have no men in this house."

At this moment the sound of a hammer striking steel somewhere came to the boy's ears, and it was with difficulty that he did not start!

The sound was distinct, and full of metal music, though it came from some distant part of the house, and Photograph Fred could but listen to it while he pretended to be busy with the blurred superscription.

"I guess it's not for this house," said the boy shadow. "I think I see my mistake, and if there are no men here, as you say, why, of course, I'm wrong."

"That's what I told you at first, but like other boys you wouldn't listen. Now git!"

Fred was now ready to depart, and the next moment he found himself on the sidewalk almost prepared to send up a cheer of victory.

He hurried direct to Jerry, who had waited for him with impatience, and the boys were soon rejoicing together as Fred narrated his adventure.

"I heard him at work; there's no doubt of it!" declared the boy detective. "I was a little too sharp for the dragon on guard. The letter racket worked pretty well, though I expected to be led out before I was ready to go. We've got no common woman to deal with in that house. She belongs to Simon Sharp; she's got no conscience like Sarah Sackett. Now, let's go home."

"And lose him?" cried Jerry, grasping Fred's arm. "My father is in the house back there. He may be taken off again. Let's go and get the police."

"And get Simon Sharp warned?"

"Who would warn the rascal?"

"The woman on guard!"

Jerry was forced to abate his eagerness, and concluded to trust everything to his alert companion.

Meantime the woman who had been so cleverly hoodwinked by the Camera Sharp had closed and locked the door. She next went down a flight of steps and applied her eye to a keyhole in the dark.

She looked into a room of small dimensions, but one with strong shutters which were supplied with bars of iron for fastenings. The room had one tenant at the time, and he was a man who sat at a work-bench hammering a bit of steel which lay across a little anvil before him.

"He's there yet, safe and sound," murmured the woman at the keyhole. "I guess the boy didn't hear the hammer, though I did, and it sent a cold chill through me. I wonder what he's making all the time? Simon knows, and if it wasn't something important he wouldn't keep him hammering all the time."

She looked a little longer and then got up.

At the same time the occupant of the room stopped hammering and threw the hammer across the apartment.

"I believe I'll go back!" cried he. "I've been away a thousand years it seems to me. What have I been doing all this time? Who have I been working for? Something seems like a dream. I haven't been myself all this time, but now I am Thomas Jump once more! My head seems ready to fly open. I have come out of a trance—a working trance! Why all these tools, and where am I? This ain't the Jersey workshop! Where are my diamonds? My God, I must keep cool or I will go mad!"

The woman on the outside heard these wildly spoken words and came back to the door.

"I never heard him talk like that before," she gasped. "He may be crazy; who knows? And I am here alone with him!"

All at once there came a knock that threw her almost off her feet, and she fell against the nearest wall.

"I want out!" exclaimed the man inside, striking the door with his fist as though it were a hammer. "I'm going back to Jersey—to my boy and wife. I've been in a dream for a long time. Let me out, you devils!"

The woman gasped again and staggered along the

wall, but soon she ran, bounded up the steps, and listened a moment in the room above. The man below was pounding on the door; every blow went to her heart and chilled it with fear.

"Heavens! he will kill me if he gets out!" the poor creature cried.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHARP VERSUS SHARP.

SIMON SHARP did not go back to the house where he had left Jerry Jump until near midnight. The scamp had "business" that kept him from the place, but if he had known anything of the situation he would have curtailed that business and gone home earlier.

When he did arrive, however, he found that his door had been beaten in by an ax or some other sharp tool, and that the bird he had left so well-caged was gone.

For some time Simon could hardly credit the evidence of sight, but there was the broken door and the empty room, and when he fully realized everything he sprang from the apartment and strode toward the room occupied by Polly Ping and her sister. Here another disappointment awaited him, for the door was locked and his sharp raps failed to elicit any response.

"The women let him out—I know it!" cried Simon. "Just let me see them and I'll warrant that they won't break down any more doors to get even with me. I'll see 'em later. Just now I must be on the lookout for the pigeon that got away, and the first thing I do must be to go back to the other house and put Ada on guard."

He did not think of looking at his trunk or he would have made another discovery equally as startling as the one just made, for he would have seen that he had been plundered, as well as outgeneraled; but eager to post "Ada," whoever she was, he tore down the stairs and into the street.

The rascal made a show of himself for some distance, or until he cooled down and saw what he was doing. If a policeman had seen him he would have wondered what was the matter with the human spider of the Bowery, and in all probability have stopped him; but Simon managed to quiet his nerves and before long was himself again.

He did not take the cars but crossed the city toward the east side where he ran up three steps and jerked a bell.

As no response came as soon as he expected it, he pulled a key from his pocket and opened the door.

"I wonder where Ada is?" he said aloud in the hall where the gas was burning dimly, and then he went to the end of the corridor and into a room where he found a door open.

"This door was to be kept locked," growled Simon. "Is this the way Ada is attending to business?"

He went down a flight of steps revealed by the opened door and found another one in the same condition.

"Heavens, I wonder what's happened?" he cried. "This door open, too? Why, here is his workshop and sleeping room."

He sprang into the apartment just ahead and turned on the gas which was burning very low.

The next moment he staggered back with a wild exclamation.

The room before him was not occupied by any one but himself. There were traces of hasty desertion, and Simon grew pale when he saw them.

"He is gone!" ejaculated the conspirator. "Somebody has been here and beaten me out of my prisoner. Who did it?"

He looked wildly around and discovered that the door had been broken open and by some one from the inside.

"Can it be that he got out himself?" he asked. "Why should he want to go away? He was perfectly contented, had forgotten all about the Jersey folks and was wrapped up in his models. But he's gone—that's very plain. Now, where is Ada? She ought to know something about the affair."

Simon left the room and went up-stairs again. He found a little apartment on the second floor and knocked lightly at the door, but received no reply. After awhile he tried the latch and finding it ready to his hand went in. He was in Ada's room, but no Ada was there to greet him.

The puzzle grew deeper, and was fast becoming too deep for Simon Sharp.

He was on the eve of giving up the hunt in the house when a sudden noise struck his ear and he listened.

The front door had opened and shut. In a moment the sharp stood in the hall where there was no light, listening, with his hand on his revolver.

The steps did not come up the stairs, but seemed to move toward the room which no longer held the model-maker, Thomas Jump, the missing Jersey-man.

Simon Sharp slipped down-stairs and listened once more. Presently he heard an exclamation of surprise; then he saw a man emerge from the workshop and stop in the light of the jet near the threshold.

"I guess I've found the thief. He's come back for something. He said he would get even with me for taking the lion's share as he calls it, and this is his work. He came and helped the man off, having first bought Ada off or disposed of her in some other way."

All this time Simon was glaring like a tiger at the man who stood within a few feet of him, and who was, in truth, his partner, Jasper Paget. Jasper was totally unaware of Simon's presence in the house, or he would not have exposed himself to the man with a finger at the trigger of a six-shooter.

Paget stood some time in the light, glared at by Simon, and when he moved it was to come straight toward his watcher, who drew back and waited for him, holding his breath for an encounter, for Paget was as quick and as wary as a cat.

"Halt!" rung out from Simon's throat, and at the same time he let his uplifted hand drop upon "Baldy's" shoulder while he thrust the revolver into his partner's face.

Jasper fell back as far as he could owing to his situation and turned pale.

"Getting even, eh?" cried Simon in derisive tones. "You said you would, you know, but it seems to me that you're taking a queer route to it."

Paget by this time had fully recognized the man in whose grip he was, and the menacing revolver rendered him very uneasy.

"I've taken nothing," he began. "Oh, don't lie to me. You've helped him off and have hidden him somewhere—you know where."

"Upon my honor, Simon—"

"Your honor? You never had any," broke in the mad rascal. "You've turned traitor as you threatened to do because I wouldn't give you everything. Where is he?"

The six-shooter pressed closer to "Baldy's" temples and he drew back again.

"I've told you the truth," he cried.

"But you came here for a purpose, and I know that I didn't tell you that he was here. You've been following me."

To this Paget made no reply for it was the truth. He had tracked Simon to the house and had learned by watching him where the inventor was.

"What became of Ada?"

"I—I don't know her. If you mean the woman you had on guard here to see that nobody not wanted in the house came—"

"That's who I mean. What became of her, I say?"

Paget shook his head.

"I see. You are determined to play a game of silence and bluff," continued Simon. "You want all the swag yourself, 'Baldy' Paget. Don't you know that dead men tell no tales? You've robbed me, not for the first time, either. You took a model—the best one he turned out, and tried to sell it to Old Hawkbill, but failed and had it stolen in the end. Not satisfied with this, you conspire to rob me of the man himself, and I guess you've succeeded."

Paget protested that he had not taken Thomas Jump away, but it was evident from the look he got that the man to whom he was talking did not believe him.

"I'll give you just two minutes in which to tell me the truth," said Simon, savagely. "I have lost all faith in you, Baldy. You've been a half traitor all along, and I was a fool for trusting you at all. Two minutes, I say. Now, take advantage of the time."

Mr. Paget looked at the revolver and then into the stern eyes of his partner. He read no mercy there, and saw that he would not be believed if he should again deny that he knew anything of the captive's flight, which was the truth. He did not know what had become of Jerry Jump's father. He had come to the house with the intention of getting even with Simon for taking the lion's share, but he was not responsible for the captive's disappearance.

Jasper suddenly noticed that the grip on his shoulder had loosened somewhat, and thought that he could shake it off.

"I can take advantage of him. I believe I can force him against the wall and get away. If I don't there will soon be a dead man in this house, and his name will be Baldy Paget."

So Simon found himself suddenly pushed back, as if a tiger had leaped upon his breast, and then he was hugging the wall, with the blazing eyes of Paget in front of him.

"I've told you the truth," cried the assailant. "I don't know what became of him. He must have run off of his own accord, or been helped away by the person you call Ada. You must not accuse me of everything, or by heavens, I'll peach! You must agree to give me my share of the spoil—my full share, mind—or you'll wish you had, when too late." Simon could not help laughing, despite the situation.

"You talk about peaching," he cried. "Why, the gallows wants you now."

"That's no difference," answered Paget. "It wants another man just as bad. Shall I have my share after this? Will you give me my just dues if I let up?"

Simon saw the light that burned in the eyes of the desperate man who had completely turned the tables upon him.

"Quick!" continued Paget. "You gave me two minutes; I give you but two seconds!"

"You shall have your full share," replied Simon.

"And I will see that I get it! Remember that!" and the hands which held the head rascal against the wall fell off, and Simon Sharp was free.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIMON FINDS THE LOST BIRD.

THE Sharp from Sharpville did not breathe free until he found himself once more on the street and fairly out of Jasper Paget's grip. He knew that his partner was a desperate character when aroused and he did not want to excite him too far.

"I must find Ada if possible for she ought to know something about Tom Jump's escape," communed Simon. "It looks a little like the man who broke the door down and got away without help. Ada may be out looking for me, and in that case I may encounter her on the pave. She swore eternal fidelity and I had every reason to believe that she meant it. Yes, I must find Ada," and with this one

thought uppermost in his mind, he sallied forth, his throat still sore from "Baldy" Paget's clutch.

It was one thing to resolve to find Ada, and quite another to find her. Of course he did not know where to look for her for she had no particular haunts, but he hoped to find her somewhere.

The escape of the model-maker bothered the city spider not a little. At the same time he recalled his promise to Jasper to give him hereafter his share of the spoil of their game. This need not trouble him a great deal, for he believed he could get out of this by some sharp practice; even if he had put Jasper out of the way—a case of wolf turning on wolf.

Simon was on the lookout for Ada when he came across a person who seemed to be studying him with a good deal of curiosity.

This individual was a young girl whose face had a familiar look, and all at once he thought of Melly, the newsgirl.

Knowing that she was acquainted with Photograph Fred, the sharp attempted to avoid her, but he found that she still followed him and that she was not disposed to give him up.

"You are followed, sir," said a voice at his elbow, and looking around he saw the very person he had been looking for—Ada!

"At last!" exclaimed Simon. "I've been rummaging the whole city for you. I know I'm followed; but I'll get clear of the spy. She's nothing but a girl, and she won't shadow me very long. You let him get away, did you?"

"I couldn't help it," answered Ada. "If you had been in my shoes you could have done no better. He came back to his senses and became a tiger in his eagerness to get out. I never saw anything like it."

"Why didn't you knock him in the head?"

"Heavens, I never thought of that; I had to hide for my life. He seemed to be seeking somebody's life, and if he had found me I wouldn't be here telling you about it. Don't blame me, Simon. I did the best I could."

"Well, maybe you did, Ada," assented the sharp; "I'm willing to think so, anyhow. Have you seen him since he got out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?" eagerly asked the sharp.

"Down by the river. It was not long ago. He was seated on the pier looking across into Jersey and muttering to himself."

"Show me where," cried Simon, starting off. "There's no time to be lost now. We must get that man back to the house or get into trouble ourselves. I'll throw the girl off the scent; don't mind her, Ada. Show me where you saw him."

Simon could not conceal the excitement that danced in his eyes. He could think of nothing but recapturing Thomas Jump, and hoped to find his victim still at the wharf, looking over into the country from which the scheme of two rascals had taken him.

Ada, who knew the city as well as Simon himself, named the pier where she had seen the old man, and the sharp started toward it, not in a direct line, but by a roundabout route, for the purpose of throwing Melly Noonan off the scent.

The newsgirl saw the movement, and resolved that the fellow should not carry out his intentions. She, therefore, started after him, and was gliding in the shadows of the street as much as possible when she was suddenly struck by a man who seemed eager to avoid some unseen person, and thrown violently to the sidewalk.

Melly, quick on foot and active, sprang up as soon as she could, but the accident had cost her some little time, and just enough, as she discovered, to lose Simon Sharp and his guide!

For a bewildered moment the newsgirl looked everywhere for the sharp, but he had vanished as if the pavement had opened and swallowed him.

"I told you so, but that was a bit of luck," smiled Simon to Ada, who had witnessed the accident to Melly. "We are rid of the child now, and she won't know which way we went when she recovers."

The pair darted into a small, dark street, which ended at the river, and in a few moments they were on the pier.

"It was right yonder," said Ada, pointing to a certain spot where some bales were piled. "I stood in the shadow of those bales and watched him some minutes."

Simon Sharp started forward with agile steps. Ada followed close at his heels.

Suddenly the sharp from Sharpville stopped and looked over his shoulder at the woman in his shadow. His eyes had a gleam of victory in their depths.

"He has found him!" cried the woman. "He has actually run across the man who got away. Ah, how shall we get him back?"

Yes, Simon Sharp had found some one, for his keen eyes had discovered a human figure lying among the bales—a man asleep.

The sharp leaned forward and looked down upon the pale face revealed by the light of the near-at-hand pier-lamp. It was a sad, pale face, and it struck the scamp that its possessor was very tired. He had probably fallen asleep among the bales while waiting for a boat to come and take him across the river to Jersey.

There was no doubt of the man's identity. It was Thomas Jump, and no mistake!

Ada stole to Simon's side on tiptoe, and looked down upon the man, then glanced up into the sharp's face and nodded approvingly.

Simon looked cautiously around, but saw nobody in sight. All he had to do was to reach down, get a good grip on Thomas Jump's arm and escort him to the street they had just left, where he could get a

carriage in which he and Ada would take the prisoner back to the house from which he had escaped.

"Stand back," said the sharp in a whisper. "I am going to surprise him now."

The woman obeyed and Simon bent over the sleeper, to grasp his arm in his grip of steel.

The mere touch of that hand seemed to thrill Thomas Jump like the shock of an electric battery. He sprang up with a loud cry and was awake in an instant.

"Don't be in a hurry," warned Simon. "I've been looking for you, and I'm mighty lucky to find you here."

"I'm not going back," returned the Jerseyman. "I've been in the dark a long time and am beginning to see light once more. Let me go!"

Jump was as powerful as the man from Sharperville. He faced Simon with eyes that fairly blazed, and Ada, who saw them, felt that a scene was near at hand.

"Don't act the fool," again warned Simon. "Things are all tore up across the river, and there's no one to see you there."

"You lie!" was the quick retort. "I have enriched you and now you would keep me from my family to make you and your vile pard richer still. I won't listen. I'm going back, I tell you. Unhand me or, by the stars above, I'll give you to the fishes!"

Simon Sharp laughed, but the next moment all color left his face, for Tom Jump had thrown his long arms about him and was dragging him toward the water.

"I guess you ought to feed the fishes, anyhow!" was hissed in his ears. "The law may never get hold of you, and the river will take care of you till the harbor patrol fishes you out. In you go, Simon. I'm almost as crazy as I used to be; but it does me good to give you to the black waters of the harbor. Down you go!"

The woman on the pier was clasping her hands and holding her breath for very terror. She saw Simon struggling in the grip of the man he had wronged, and felt herself powerless to do him any good.

The man from Jersey suddenly seized Simon's throat and began to shut off his wind in a manner that weakened the struggling scamp.

"I'm going to free myself," cried Jump. "I don't care what became of the diamonds. I can get more by my brain if I want them. What I want just now is to see you go down to the bottom of the river. Ha, ha! what a supper you will make for the fish!"

Simon shuddered. The man was certainly mad again. He exerted all his strength in hopes of breaking away from the madman who had him in his arms. They had reached the very verge of the pier and were struggling like two wrestlers, now half-way over and now back again.

"Ada, Ada!" cried Simon. "For heaven's sake come to my rescue."

"I'll throw her in after you if she does," exclaimed the Jerseyman. "I'll give the fish a double supper."

Ada hesitated. "Help! help!" she shouted.

The next instant the two men were on the very edge of the pier—the wronged man crowding the villain to the brink; they remained there for a moment, and then both fell out of sight and into the dark water below!

This scene seemed to paralyze the woman for a moment. She stood on the wharf, with her heart hushed in her bosom, and her bloodless hands clasped. She could hear the men struggling in the waters, fighting still in each other's arms.

At last she ran forward. She bent over the edge of the pier and ventured to look. The water ran back under the slimy piles with considerable force, but she could see nothing of the two men.

"Both are dead," decided the woman. "If I am found here, they will make me tell the whole story, and that won't put me in a very nice light. It might even send me to prison."

She fell back and ran away, leaving Simon Sharp and his victim to their fate, and wished for wings that she might get far from the accursed spot in the least possible time.

Half way up the pier she encountered a girl, who tried to stop her.

"Where is he?" cried the girl.

It was Melly! Ada saw this, and broke away, pushing the newsgirl from her with savage violence, and continued her flight until she found a place where she thought she was safe.

Simon Sharp and his victim had gone down together.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOUBLY CAUGHT.

"This is strange. The house is quite empty. Has Simon Sharp moved again?"

"I'm afraid he has, Fred, and this time beyond our reach."

"Don't think that, Jerry. We started out to find your father, to rescue him from the grip of the conspirators, and I'm not going to give up just because we've found this house empty. We saw Simon Sharp on the step, you know, and here are evidences that this little room has recently been a workshop of some kind."

"Look at that door; it seems to have been broken down by some person."

"Yes, and from this room too."

The two boy sharps stood in the room from which the inventing Jerseyman had lately escaped. They had gained an entrance to the house too late to find

the man they sought, and too late, as well, to find Ada, who might have been forced to tell them all under threat of the law.

Thomas Jump was still lost, and his whereabouts were now a greater mystery than ever.

It was the same night of the adventures detailed in the last chapter, and the lads had counted on finding the lost parent, and ending the hunt which had more than once put their own lives in peril. They hoped to nab Simon Sharp and Jasper Paget, and thus do the whole city a service, which it would be likely to appreciate when it learned the truth.

But they had been baffled once more, and victory seemed as far off as ever. Jerry was almost on the eve of giving up the hunt. His hopes had risen high to be dashed to earth by the last disappointment, and if Fred had not spoken so encouragingly of the future, he would have gone home forthwith.

They made a thorough search of the house, but found nothing that rewarded them until just when they were about to quit the place.

Fred found a letter under a book and the boys look over it together. It was addressed to "Mrs. Ada Winters," and they concluded that such was the name of the woman who had guarded Thomas Jump for Simon Sharp.

A search of the Directory showed that the woman named or one of the same name dwelt in another part of the city, whither they went at once to find that she had moved, but had left her trunk behind.

"I'm afraid we'll have to give up this part of the trail," said Fred, while they walked from the last house visited. "Ada Winters may come back, or she may not. If she is quit of Simon Sharp we may find her, but I fear she is still hand-in-glove with the conspiracy."

The next day the boys renewed their search, and the morning sun crept high without rewarding them.

Jerry received a letter from his mother saying that she was sick and asked him to come home. She said that she had despaired of ever seeing her lost husband again, and she wanted to have the assistance of her only child during what she felt would prove her last sickness. This made Jerry eager to return home, and he said he would take the night train into Southern Jersey and give up the long hunt.

Fred Paster had just made a visit to Old Hawkbill, who told him that Jasper Paget had entered his shop that morning disguised, and that when he recognized him he went away before playing any game of revenge.

The old pawnbroker told the boy detective exactly how the spider was dressed and Jerry was posted to be on the lookout.

"Here he comes now," said Fred as a nondescript figure turned into the Bowery and came toward them.

"Can you catch him, Fred?"

"That's just what I'm going to do," smiled the young photographer. "I want to add 'Baldy's' phiz to my collection to put alongside of Simon's. In a moment I'll have him. He doesn't see us as yet. There, I've caught the vulture!"

Not until he had reached a spot opposite the boys and almost within arm's reach of them did Mr. Paget have the least inkling of their presence. He saw them so suddenly that he fell back, his lower jaw dropping in amazement and his eyes bulging out.

"That fellow is trying to avoid arrest," remarked Fred as Paget passed. "Something's turned up all wrong. We mustn't lose sight of him now," and they turned in and became the rascal's shadows.

"Baldy" quickened his steps and seemed very eager to give his young trailers the slip. He dodged from one street into another, confirming Fred's assertion that something had gone wrong with the conspiracy.

"There! he's dodged behind that wagon," cried the Camera Sharp. "Keep him in sight, Jerry. Everything may depend on this chase."

Paget was moving swiftly just now, knowing that the young detectives were in hot pursuit, and the boys expected to see him break into a run.

Suddenly they noticed him stop in the middle of the street like a man bewildered by some danger.

"Quick, there!" cried a policeman who had seen him. "Do you want to die, man?"

"Baldy" said something which the officer could not understand, and the next moment he made an effort to get out of the way of the heavy Express wagon which was rushing down upon him. His attempt was made in vain, however, for the horse struck him and threw him in front of his hoofs.

The big policeman had rushed forward but too late to save the man from the fall, and when he forced the animal back he had placed one foot on the man's breast.

They picked Jasper up, gasping and now covered with blood, and sent for the patrol wagon.

"They were after me and I didn't see the horse," explained Paget.

"Who were?"

"The boy shadows. Are they here? Don't let them know that I got struck! My name is Bosler, Billy Bosler, and I'm a stranger in the city."

At this moment, Fred, who was looking on and hearing every word of the falsehood, caught Paget's eye, and the man shivered.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Bosler," smiled the Camera Sharp, emphasizing the name. "I guess you would rather it had been Simon than your self?"

"Take that boy away!" cried Jasper. "If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be here, all crushed by a horse."

Just then an Express wagon came up, and Paget was carried to it. The boys heard the command to

drive to the accident hospital, and followed the vehicle as fast as possible.

"That man is near the end of life's string," said Fred. "He may talk before he dies."

But, Jasper Paget maintained a sullen silence on the hospital cot, though he still said that his name was Bosler, when asked.

"What does the doctor say?" he inquired, at last.

The nurse looked at a man who was standing near by.

"Tell me," cried Jasper. "I want to know the truth, no matter how severe it is. If I've got to go the journey, I want to know when I have to start."

There was a short consultation on the part of the attendants, and it was decided to tell him the facts. He had but a short time to live, and they measured out his minutes.

"Did those boys follow me here?" he queried.

"There are two boys in the waiting-room now," was the reply.

"Send 'em in."

In a few seconds the boy comrades came and looked at the man on the cot.

"You took my picture. I saw you do it," said Jasper, with a faint smile. "I've been afraid of that camera of yours ever since you entered the game ag'in' us. It's something one can't get around; I don't want to talk about these things. I've got something more important to say. I guess you're too late to finish the game as you want to. The river got 'em both last night."

"Got who?" demanded Fred.

"Why, Simon and the prisoner."

The lads stood like spellbound people before the speaker.

"I saw Ada, and she told me all about it," continued Jasper. "That is why I was running off in these clothes. With Simon and the Jerseyman dead, I didn't want to stand all the blame, don't you see? You'll have to find Ada to get the story."

Jerry Jump fell back and covered his face. After all his father was dead! The long hunt for him had ended at the river, and he would not get to punish the man who had wrecked their happy home and blighted his mother's happiness! For a moment he felt like springing upon Jasper Paget, for he had helped in the foul conspiracy; but when he remembered that the guilty man was almost at the eternal bar of Justice, he kept back his hands.

"Where did it happen?" Fred Paster was asking.

"You must find Ada," was the reply.

"But, where is Ada?"

"She went to her old quarters, No. 232 T—street."

The boys exchanged glances. It was the number where the woman had left her trunk!

"Ada will tell you—I know she will," resumed Paget. "I helped Simon Sharp, and he took the lion's share. I don't care if the river did get him; but I wish now that the other man had escaped. The diamonds that we got have strangely disappeared. I got but three of the smallest. Simon has hidden them somewhere; I know he hasn't disposed of the tenth of them. As to the models, we've made something out of them, for the prisoner, who seemed to have forgotten all about his Jersey home, turned them out pretty fast, and we either sold them or took out patents on them. I never saw such a head as that man has."

Jasper Paget now began to sink rapidly. Speech failed him, but he scrawled on a sheet of paper Ada's address, and added "Search Simon's room," then pushed the paper toward Photograph Fred, smiled and died.

"Come," urged the Camera Sharp to Jerry; "we're almost at the end of the hunt. It may not be as bad as Jasper Paget made out. Something tells me that it isn't. I can't believe that Simon Sharp is going to escape us by the river route."

The young beagles had rushed from the ward, and were quitting the hospital as rapidly as possible.

Fred had spoken truly. They were at the close of the game, but they did not dream what was still in store for them.

CHAPTER XX.

NOT AS SHARP AS HE THOUGHT.

"SEARCH Simon's room; that's what Jasper Paget said," remarked Jerry to his fast friend, as they hurried along the street. "If he's in the river he will not disturb us."

"Do you think the diamonds are there?" queried the Camera Sharp. "I found the models in his trunk, you know, but the gems may have been there too for aught I know. It seems to me that we want Ada first."

"Ada, then," was the reply.

Fred and Jerry proceeded to the number designated by Jasper Paget, and the woman who had admitted them before gave them a curious look.

She started slightly when Fred asked her if the woman who had a trunk there had come back.

"This is a case of life and death," added the young detective. "If she is here she must be seen, for the longer she hides the worse it may be for her."

The housekeeper did not reply, but looked up the flight of steps, and seemed to be weighing something of great importance in her mind.

"I am here; tell them so," came down from above. "They will set the police after me if I refuse to tell, and I've had trouble enough in my life."

At the same time the boys caught sight of a figure at the top of the steps, and Fred led the way upward. The woman who awaited them was past thirty, but good-looking, though there were dark lines beneath her eyes.

"I am not going to ask you who gave me away," said she, smiling faintly to Photograph Fred. "It is enough to know that you have found me. I half suspect, though, that it was the girl I encountered on the pier after the terrible scene I was forced to witness last night; but never mind. Have they found the bodies?"

"Not yet," said young Paster, guessing what the terrified woman meant. "You are Ada?"

"Yes, Ada. I presume you want to hear the whole story?"

"If you can tell it in few words," answered the boy.

"I can try."

The next minute Ada was telling her story of the encounter on the pier, but she prefaced it with how she had become acquainted with Simon, and how Thomas Jump effected his escape from the house which she presided over in the interest of the Sharp from Sharperville.

"Do you really think they both perished last night?" asked Fred; at the conclusion of the narrative.

"I cannot think otherwise. I ran to the edge of the pier and looked over but could not see either. The water was very boisterous and came rushing against the piles with a swift current."

"It may have washed them under the wharf."

"And drowned them in the blackness there? That would be more terrible still."

As Ada had described the exact spot of the encounter so that the boys could go straight to it, thanks to Fred's knowledge of the vicinity, she was left alone with the promise that for her story she should not be brought into further notoriety, the boy comrades went away.

"Now for the pier," cried Fred.

In due course of time they reached the wharf and found a lot of men engaged in removing the bales to the stores up town.

The boys paid no attention to them but went to the edge of the pier and Fred leaned over and tried to look under it.

"Ar' ye hunting the rat what crawled out of that this mornin'?" suddenly demanded one of the men. "He was a pitiful lookin' object; must hev been back in the hole all night, hidin' from the cops."

"Did you see him?" asked the young detective.

"Didn't I, though? He saw me and hustled off as fast as he could go which wasn't very fast, seen' the condition of his duds."

"Was he small, large, white or black?"

"About my size. He had a mustache but it was drippin' an' not pretty. He limped a little, too."

"Simon Sharp!" thought Photograph Fred. "The river spared the rascal and drowned Thomas Jump! The guilty lives, the innocent goes down! That's the way of the world half the time."

The visit to the wharf yielded no more than this; but it was something. Simon Sharp had escaped! "He may have a secret," remarked Fred to Jerry.

"We will go to the villain's room now."

Not long afterward the two young trackers were ascending the stairs which they had reason to recollect, and soon stood in front of the door which Phil had cut down in order to rescue his companion from the web.

They heard no noise and approached the door, which could not be locked after the attack, and Photograph Fred pushed it open.

"Who's there?—You, Ada?" called a voice from one side of the semi-darkened apartment.

The voice took the young detective across the room, and Fred seeing a revolver lying on a stand at the head of the bed, caught it up just as a hand was put out to seize it, and leveled it at the face that presented itself.

"It is not Ada," said the Camera Sharp. "She won't come to you any more. Simon Sharp, I guess the net has caught its owner."

The man on the bed fell back and stared at the boys as if his eyes would leap from his head.

"What do you want?" he demanded, his face looking bruised and swollen in the uncertain light.

"You ought to know without asking. In the first place we want you and then we want to hear the conclusion of the fight on the pier."

"Ha, you want to know, too, I suppose?" grinned Simon, leaning toward Jerry. "I guess you're the most interested one in the case!"

"I want the truth, Simon," answered the Jersey boy. "I have sworn to obtain it—"

"What if I should refuse to tell?" broke in the scoundrel with a good deal of malignity.

"Then, we'll see what the law will do. Ada told us—"

"Did she peach?" cried Simon. "I wish I had her throat in my grip!"

"Just where you're not very likely to have it," Fred assured. "You went down with Thomas Jump, your victim?"

"I couldn't help it. He had me in his arms. Haven't you found anything of him?"

"Nothing definite."

"Well, he got away. He was luckier than I was. We were thrown back under the pier by the down tide, but he got loose and left me stranded there nearly drowned. This is a fact. I won't lie now, for I guess it wouldn't do me any good. He got away, I tell you."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Jerry. "There's hope yet!"

"Of course there is," put in Simon. "I really hope he's safe, for, by Jove, I want it to go easy with me after all; that's natural," and the scoundrel laughed.

Jerry took the revolver and remained in the room while Fred slipped out. For a while Simon looked searchingly at Jerry, and then said:

"You're a pretty shrewd boy—the slickest I ever

had in my web. But then, you've had good schooling, for that Camera Sharp's a dandy. I suppose you'll prosecute me to the bitter end. What do you think of the proposition I once made to you in this very room?"

"I refused it then, and of course reject it now," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Then I missed it by not wringing your neck," growled the sharp as steps came up the stairs, and Fred and an officer walked into the room.

Simon at sight of the policeman leaned over the edge of the bed and grinned.

"Caught by kids without a show of fight!" said he. "I ought to go up for life. Here, put 'em on, officer. I hope you'll get 'Baldy', too, for I'll want company."

"Baldy" 's dead, sir."

"Dead?" echoed Simon with a sudden start; then he thought a moment and ended: "Them sort o' fellows tell nothing."

The scoundrel soon found himself the tenant of a different sort of a room than the one in which he had been surprised. He had a harder bed, and could not go far when he got up. It was a cell in a station house, and a serious crime was written opposite his name on the Court Record.

"We'll go to the hospital and see the man who was found wandering on the wharves this morning," announced Fred to Jerry, when they had seen Simon in the cell. "The policeman saw him and, from his description of the man, I have hopes."

The feet of the Jersey boy seemed shod with the sandals of Mercury while he went toward the accident hospital. If he should be disappointed he felt that he could not go home and break his mother's heart forever.

He was conducted into a small room where a man, wrapped in blankets, was looking into a fire. The moment the boy caught sight of him he bounded forward with a cry of—

"Father!"

For a full minute the scared man held the boy at arm's length and then exclaimed:

"It is all true! I am really Thomas Jump, and this is Jerry, my own boy!"

A close search of Sharp's room revealed, deftly concealed there, a paper of diamonds which the inventor recognized. A few of them were missing, but enough remained to enrich the true owner.

When Simon, rogue, crook, and abductor, was brought to trial, the whole story of his rascality came out, along with Photograph Fred's part in the rescue, and the court thought he ought to have about twenty years, which he got.

Father and son went back to Jersey to gladden the eyes and heart of a little woman there. They took Fred Paster along, with his camera, and he had the satisfaction of showing the Jersey folk the portraits of the conspirators which he had deftly caught "on the wing."

Thomas Jump fully recovered, and his inventions substantially enriched the family. He has made Fred and his mother comfortably independent, and Melly the newsgirl has not only not been forgotten, but, ere long, she will give up her "stand" for a home in Jersey.

"I hear," said Tatz Holcomb, to Photograph Fred, not long ago, "that I've lost Melly. She's a boss girl, you know, and a chap can't get his first love all the time. My respects to Miss Melly—your cousin, ha, ha—I'll see you later!" and Tatz bowed himself off, glad to get out of the conspiracy so easily, for Fred did not drag him into court to tell what he knew about the two confederates in rascality.

A few months have passed since the occurrence of the events we have recorded, and the maddest man of all is the man who looks through bars, and curses the Boy Photographer whose shrewdness and perseverance sent him "up the river."

THE END.

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